

ISRAEL 2020 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Israel is a multiparty parliamentary democracy. Although it has no constitution, its parliament, the unicameral 120-member Knesset, has enacted a series of “Basic Laws” that enumerate fundamental rights. Certain fundamental laws, orders, and regulations legally depend on the existence of a “state of emergency,” which has been in effect since 1948. Under the Basic Laws, the Knesset has the power to dissolve itself and mandate elections. On March 2, Israel held its third general election within a year, which resulted in a coalition government. On December 23, following the government’s failure to pass a budget, the Knesset dissolved itself, which paved the way for new elections scheduled for March 23, 2021.

Under the authority of the prime minister, the Israeli Security Agency combats terrorism and espionage in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza. The national police, including the border police and the immigration police, are under the authority of the Ministry of Public Security. The Israeli Defense Forces are responsible for external security but also have some domestic security responsibilities and report to the Ministry of Defense. Israeli Security Agency forces operating in the West Bank fall under the Israeli Defense Forces for operations and operational debriefing. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security services. The Israeli military and civilian justice systems have on occasion found members of the security forces to have committed abuses.

Significant human rights issues included: reports of unlawful or arbitrary killings, including targeted killings of Israeli civilians and soldiers; arbitrary detention, often extraterritorial in Israel, of Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza; restrictions on Palestinians residing in Jerusalem including arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, family, and home; interference with freedom of association, including stigmatizing human rights nongovernmental organizations; significant restrictions on freedom of movement; violence against asylum seekers and irregular migrants; violence or threats of violence against national, racial, or ethnic minority groups; and labor rights abuses against foreign workers and

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Palestinians from the West Bank.

The government took steps to prosecute and punish officials who committed abuses within Israel regardless of rank or seniority.

This section of the report covers Israel within the 1949 Armistice Agreement line as well as Golan Heights and East Jerusalem territories that Israel occupied during the June 1967 war and where it later extended its domestic law, jurisdiction, and administration. The United States recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in 2017 and Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights in 2019. Language in this report is not meant to convey a position on any final status issues to be negotiated between the parties to the conflict, including the specific boundaries of Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem, or the borders between Israel and any future Palestinian state.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from

a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

There were several reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings. The Ministry of Justice's Department for Investigations of Police Officers (DIPO) is responsible for investigating alleged unlawful actions involving police, while the Ministry of Justice's State Attorney's Office is responsible for investigating alleged unlawful actions involving the prosecution.

According to the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), there were 190 instances of rocket fire from Gaza at Israeli territory, 90 of which fell in uninhabited areas. The IDF intercepted 93 percent of the rockets fired at populated areas. In addition the IDF reported it foiled 38 infiltration attempts from Gaza and destroyed one terror tunnel into Israel.

The Israeli Security Agency (ISA, or Shin Bet) foiled 423 significant terror attacks in the West Bank and Jerusalem, according to the government. By comparison 563 attacks were thwarted in 2019, 581 in 2018, and 418 in 2017. Of the attacks the

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ISA prevented, 281 were classified as shootings, 78 as stabbings, 10 as ramming attacks, 58 as bomb attacks, and five as planned kidnapping attacks. Israeli forces engaged in conflict throughout the year with Palestinians militants in Gaza in response to rocket attacks, incendiary balloons and attempted infiltrations. Israeli forces killed 20 Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, including one person at the Gaza perimeter fence, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (UNOCHA) (see West Bank and Gaza section).

According to the government and media reports, terrorist attacks targeting Israelis killed one person in Israel, in Petah Tikva. The attacker was a Palestinian from the West Bank. In addition the Israeli government reported foiling numerous terrorist attacks during the year.

On June 30, Israeli police in Jerusalem's Old City fatally shot Iyad Halak, a Palestinian resident with autism, after he allegedly failed to follow police orders to stop. Police stated they believed Halak was carrying a "suspicious object." Defense Minister Benny Gantz expressed regret for the incident and called for a quick investigation. On October 21, DIPO issued a statement that the prosecution intended to indict, pending a hearing, a police officer suspected of the shooting on charges of reckless homicide. According to the Ministry of Justice, investigators carefully examined the circumstances of the incident and determined that Halak had not posed any danger to police and civilians who were at the scene, that the police officer discharged his weapon not in accordance with police procedures, and that the police officer had not taken proportionate alternative measures which were at his disposal.

On September 13, the NGO Adalah and PCATI submitted a request to the Supreme Court demanding the reversal of a decision of the then state attorney to close the investigation into the 2017 police killing of Yaqoub Abu al-Qian in Umm al-Hiran and criminally to indict officers responsible for the death of Abu al-Qian.

In October 2019 the Supreme Court granted a petition filed by the family of Israeli citizen Kheir al-Din Hamdan ordering Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit and the DIPO to indict police officer Yizhak Begin, who shot and killed Hamdan in 2014, to determine the exact charges. In 2015 the DIPO closed its investigation

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into Hamdan's killing. On April 27, the Supreme Court President ordered an expanded panel of justices to review whether an indictment could be ordered against police officers who were questioned without a warning during the DIPO investigation. The review continued at year's end.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The law prohibits torture, the application of physical or psychological pain, and assault or pressure by a public official. Israeli law exempts from prosecution ISA interrogators who use what are termed "exceptional methods" in cases that are determined by the ISA to involve an imminent threat, but the government determined in 2018 that the rules, procedures, and methods of interrogation were confidential for security reasons.

Authorities continued to state the ISA held detainees in isolation only in extreme cases and when there was no alternative option, and that the ISA did not use isolation as a means of augmenting interrogation, forcing a confession, or punishment. An independent Office of the Inspector for Complaints against ISA Interrogators in the Ministry of Justice handled complaints of misconduct and abuse in interrogations. The decision to open an investigation against an ISA employee is at the discretion of the attorney general.

In criminal cases investigated by police involving crimes with a maximum imprisonment for conviction of 10 years or more, regulations require recording the interrogations; however, an extended temporary law exempts the ISA from the audio and video recording requirement for interrogations of suspects related to "security offenses." In non-security-related cases, ISA interrogation rooms are equipped with closed-circuit cameras, and only supervisors appointed by the Ministry of Justice have access to real-time audiovisual feeds. Supervisors are required to report to the comptroller any irregularities they observe during interrogations. The nongovernmental organization (NGO) Public Committee

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against Torture in Israel (PCATI) criticized this mechanism as insufficient to prevent and identify abuses, arguing that the absence of a recording of an interrogation impedes later accountability and judicial review.

According to PCATI, the government acknowledged that it used “exceptional measures” during interrogation in some cases, but the Ministry of Justice refused to provide information regarding the number of such “necessity interrogations.” These measures, according to PCATI, included beatings, forcing an individual to hold a stress position for long periods, threats of rape and physical harm, painful pressure from shackles or restraints applied to the forearms, sleep deprivation, and threats against families of detainees.

PCATI also argued that torture is not enumerated as a specific offense under the criminal code in Israel, despite the government’s statements to the relevant UN treaty bodies it would introduce such a law. According to PCATI, there was an uptick in the use of “special measures” on security detainees in 2019, with at least 15 persons subjected to what it considered physical torture during interrogations between August and November 2019. PCATI stated the government’s system for investigating allegations of mistreatment of detainees shows persistent and systematic shortcomings. According to PCATI, the average time it takes authorities to address complaints is more than 44 months. The Ministry of Justice stated that its internal reviews led to the opening of two investigations since 2018. PCATI claims that approximately 1,300 complaints of ISA torture were submitted to the Ministry of Justice since 2001, resulting in one criminal investigation and no indictments.

Israeli security forces arrested Samer al-Arbid, a Palestinian suspect in the August 2019 killing of Rina Shnerb, who was killed near the settlement of Dolev in the West Bank. Security forces placed al-Arbid in solitary confinement, and transferred him to an interrogation center in Jerusalem. Two days later he was admitted to a hospital unconscious and with serious injuries, including the inability to breathe, kidney failure, and broken ribs. According to PCATI, the ISA used “exceptional measures” in interrogating al-Arbid, who was subsequently released from the hospital into an Israeli Prison Service (IPS) medical facility, where his interrogation continued. The Ministry of Justice’s Inspector of Interrogee Complaints opened an investigation into the incident. The investigation was

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underway at year's end.

The government stated that requests from prisoners for independent medical examination at the prisoner's expense are reviewed by an IPS medical team. According to PCATI and Physicians for Human Rights Israel (PHRI), IPS medics and doctors ignored bruises and injuries resulting from violent arrests and interrogations. In its 2016 review of the country's compliance with the UN Convention against Torture, the UN Committee against Torture recommended (among 50 other recommendations) that the government provide for independent medical examinations for all detainees.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

The law provides prisoners and detainees the right to conditions that do not harm their health or dignity.

Physical Conditions: Local human rights organizations reported Palestinian security prisoners (those convicted or suspected of nationalistically motivated violence) often faced more restrictive conditions than prisoners characterized as criminals. Restrictive conditions included increased incidence of administrative detention, restricted family visits, ineligibility for temporary furloughs, and solitary confinement.

A 2019 report by the Public Defender's Office on 42 prisons and detention centers warned that despite efforts by the IPS to improve prison conditions and correct deficiencies noted in previous reports, grave violations of the rights of detainees continued to occur. The report described thousands of prisoners held in unsuitable living conditions in outdated facilities, some of which were unfit for human habitation. According to the report, many of the prisoners, especially minors, were punished by solitary confinement and disproportionate use of shackling. The Public Defender's Office found this particularly concerning in cases where prisoners suffered from mental disabilities.

As of December the government had not applied a 2015 law authorizing force-feeding of under specific conditions of prisoners on hunger strikes. The Israel Medical Association declared the law unethical and urged doctors to refuse to implement it. Regulations stipulate that medical treatment must be provided in

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reasonable quality and time, based on medical considerations, and within the resources and funding available for the IPS. Regulations also allow the IPS to deny medical treatment if there are budgetary concerns, according to the PHRI.

A report published by the PHRI in 2019 pointed to significant failures in the IPS medical system. The report assessed that the separate health care system for prisoners was unable to provide services equivalent to those provided to the general population through enrollment in government-sponsored health maintenance organizations (HMOs). According to the PHRI's findings, the services do not meet the accepted HMO standards, and in half of the incidents examined, there was a risk posed to the health of the inmates due to substandard treatment or denial of treatment. PHRI recommendations included applying national HMO standards to medical care provided in IPS facilities, establishing a professional and efficient supervision mechanism to govern medical services provided by IPS, and increasing the opportunities for outside medical practitioners to provide care in prisons.

Administration: Authorities conducted proper investigations of credible allegations of mistreatment, except as noted above. On August 25, the Knesset passed a law permitting virtual hearings with prisoners and detainees during the COVID-19 crisis. While authorities usually allowed visits from lawyers and stated that every inmate who requested to meet with an attorney was able to do so, this was not always the case. NGOs monitoring prison conditions reported that adult and juvenile Palestinian detainees were denied access to a lawyer during their initial arrest. The government granted visitation permits to family members of prisoners from the West Bank on a limited basis and restricted those entering from Gaza more severely.

Independent Monitoring: Despite COVID-19 pandemic restrictions in Israel, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) maintained its visits to detention facilities (including interrogation centers) with adapted visiting modalities to monitor conditions of detention, treatment, and access to family contacts. The ICRC also monitored humanitarian consequences of COVID-19 and related measures on Palestinian detainees and their families and continued engaging concerned authorities in this regard. The ICRC's family visit program--through which families of Palestinian detainees may visit their relatives in Israeli custody--

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remained suspended for families from Gaza due to COVID-19 movement restrictions.

Improvements: In 2018 the Knesset passed a temporary law for three years granting early release of prisoners (excluding security prisoners) in order to facilitate implementation of a Supreme Court verdict requiring prisons to allocate a living space of 48 square feet to each prisoner. According to the NGO Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), each prisoner is allocated 33 square feet, and approximately 40 percent of prisoners were imprisoned in cells that amounted to less than 32 square feet per person. The court ruled that the implementation of the verdict on the ISA detention center must be implemented no later than May 2021. The government notified the court that as of May no more than 40 percent of all prisoners were imprisoned in cells smaller than the minimal space determined to be adequate by the court.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention and provides for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court, and the government generally observed these requirements. Authorities applied the same laws to all residents of Jerusalem, regardless of their citizenship status. NGOs and Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem alleged that security forces disproportionately devoted enforcement actions to Palestinian neighborhoods, particularly Issawiya, with temporary checkpoints and raids at higher levels than in West Jerusalem. Palestinians also criticized police for devoting fewer resources on a per capita basis to regular crime and community policing in Palestinian neighborhoods. Police did not maintain a permanent presence in areas of Jerusalem outside the barrier and only entered to conduct raids, according to NGOs. Palestinian residents of the West Bank and Gaza detained on security grounds fell under military jurisdiction, even if detained inside Israel (see West Bank and Gaza section).

The law allows the government to detain irregular migrants and asylum seekers who arrived after 2014 from countries to which government policy prohibits deportation, mainly Eritrea and Sudan, for three months “for the purpose of identification and to explore options for relocation of the individual.” The law also

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states authorities must provide for irregular migrants taken into detention to have a hearing within five days. After three months in detention, authorities must release the migrant on bail, except when the migrant poses a risk to the state or the public, or when there is difficulty in identity verification.

The government may detain without trial and for an indefinite period irregular migrants who were “implicated in criminal proceedings.” According to the NGO Hotline for Refugees and Migrants (HRM), this policy enabled indefinite detention either without a trial or following the completion of time served. According to HRM, during the year the government released 20 irregular migrants, detained under the criminal procedure, due to COVID-19 regulations seeking to reduce overcrowding in prisons. In 2017 the Supreme Court ruled that the legality of this policy required additional review, but it had not issued any guidance by year’s end.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

Police must have a warrant based on sufficient evidence and issued by an authorized official to arrest a suspect. The following applies to detainees, excluding those in administrative detention. Authorities generally informed such persons promptly of charges against them; the law allows authorities to detain suspects without charge for 24 hours prior to appearing before a judge, with limited exceptions allowing for up to 48 hours; authorities generally respected these rights for persons arrested in the country; there was a functioning bail system, and detainees could appeal decisions denying bail; and authorities allowed detainees to consult with an attorney in a timely manner, including one provided by the government for the indigent, and to contact family members promptly.

Authorities detained most Palestinian prisoners within Israel. Authorities prosecuted under Israeli military law Palestinians held in Israel who were not citizens, a practice the government has applied since 1967. The government has asserted in domestic court proceedings that this practice is consistent with international obligations related to occupation. Some human rights groups, including Military Court Watch, claim that Israel’s detention of the majority of convicted Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza in prisons inside Israel is a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. According to the circumstances of each case, such as the severity of the alleged offense, status as a minor, risk of

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escape, or other factors, authorities either granted or denied bail to noncitizens of Palestinian origin detained for security violations.

Authorities may prosecute persons detained on security grounds criminally or hold them as administrative detainees or illegal combatants, according to one of three legal regimes.

First, under a temporary law on criminal procedures, repeatedly renewed since 2006, the IPS may hold persons suspected of a security offense for 48 hours prior to bringing them before a judge, with limited exceptions allowing the IPS to detain a suspect for up to 96 hours prior to bringing the suspect before the senior judge of a district court. In security-related cases, authorities may hold a person for up to 35 days without an indictment (versus 30 days for nonsecurity cases). The law allows the court to extend detentions on security grounds for an initial period of up to 20 days for interrogation without an indictment (versus 15 days for nonsecurity cases). Authorities may deny security detainees access to an attorney for up to 21 days under civilian procedures.

Second, the Emergency Powers Law allows the Ministry of Defense to detain persons administratively without charge for up to six months, renewable indefinitely.

Third, the Illegal Combatant Law permits authorities to hold a detainee for 14 days before review by a district court judge, deny access to counsel for up to 21 days with the attorney general's approval, and allow indefinite detention, subject to semiannual district court reviews and appeals to the Supreme Court.

The government stated it used separate detention only when a detainee threatened himself or others and authorities had exhausted other options--or in some cases during interrogation, to prevent disclosure of information. In such cases authorities maintained the detainee had the right to meet with International Committee of the Red Cross representatives, IPS personnel, and medical personnel, if necessary. According to the government, the IPS did not hold Palestinian detainees in separate detention punitively or to induce confessions. NGOs including Military Court Watch, the NGO HaMoked, and B'Tselem accused authorities of using isolation to

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punish or silence politically prominent Palestinian detainees.

The Public Defender's Office reported in 2019 that prisoners with mental disabilities were often held in conditions that may worsen their mental health. Palestinian sources reported the IPS placed in isolation, without a full medical evaluation, Palestinian detainees with mental disabilities or who were a threat to themselves or others. According to the PHRI, isolation of Palestinian prisoners with mental disabilities was common.

Arbitrary Arrest: There were allegations that authorities arbitrarily arrested Israeli citizens and Palestinians who participated in protests. For example, on October 3, police arrested 35 protesters in demonstrations in Tel Aviv against the government. Many of the arrests, according to protest groups, were carried out in an arbitrary manner. Police stated grounds for the arrests included violation of COVID-19 emergency regulations regarding protests, which required social distancing, remaining within a one-half mile radius of one's home, and wearing personal protective equipment (see section 2.b.).

In 2018 President Rivlin and then justice minister Ayelet Shaked invited Ethiopian-Israelis whom authorities had previously charged with minor offenses, such as insulting or obstructing a public servant, or participating in prohibited assemblies, to apply for their criminal records to be deleted if they were not imprisoned due to their offenses. According to the Ministry of Justice, since 2018, 115 requests were submitted to remove criminal records, 35 met the minimum requirements, 23 were granted, and eight were being processed at the end of the year.

Pretrial Detention: Administrative detention continued to result in lengthy pretrial detention for security detainees (see above).

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The law provides for an independent judiciary, and the government generally

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respected judicial independence and impartiality.

Trial Procedures

The law provides for the right to a fair and public trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right. Exceptions to the right for a public trial include national security concerns, protection of the interest of a minor or an individual requiring special protection, and protection of the identity of an accuser or defendant in a sex-offense case. The law permits publishing the identity of a victim of a sex offense, provided the victim gives written consent for publication.

Defendants enjoy the rights to a presumption of innocence, to be informed promptly and in detail of the charges against them, to a fair and public trial without undue delay, and to be present at their trial. They may consult with an attorney or, if indigent, have one provided at public expense. They have the right to adequate time and facilities to prepare their defense. Defendants who cannot understand or speak the language used in court have the right to free interpretation as necessary from the moment charged through all appeals. Defendants have the right to confront witnesses against them and to present witnesses and evidence on their own behalf. They may not be compelled to testify or confess guilt and may appeal to the Supreme Court.

The prosecution is under a general obligation following an indictment to provide all evidence to the defense. The government may on security grounds withhold from defense lawyers evidence it has gathered that is not for use in its case against the accused. The Supreme Court (with regard to civilian courts) and the Court of Appeals (with regard to military courts) may scrutinize the decision to withhold such evidence. The rules of evidence in espionage cases tried in criminal court do not differ from the normal rules of evidence, and no use of secret evidence is permissible.

Children as young as age 12 may be imprisoned if convicted of serious crimes such as murder, attempted murder, or manslaughter. The government reported no child was imprisoned under this law as of the end of the year.

The government tried Palestinian residents of the West Bank accused of security

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offenses in Israeli military courts.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

The government described security prisoners as those convicted or suspected of nationalistically motivated violence. Some human rights organizations claimed that Palestinian security prisoners held in Israel should be considered political prisoners.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

An independent and impartial judiciary adjudicates lawsuits seeking damages for, or cessation of, human rights violations. Administrative remedies exist, and court orders usually were enforced. Palestinian residents of Jerusalem may file suit against the government of Israel under the same rules that govern access to judicial and administrative remedies by Israeli citizens. By law nonresident Palestinians may file suit in civil courts to obtain compensation in some cases, even when a criminal suit is unsuccessful and the actions against them are considered legal.

Property Restitution

In 2016 the state comptroller recommended the government quickly act to settle land claims, plan resettlement of Bedouin citizens in cooperation with the Bedouin community, develop infrastructure in recognized Bedouin communities, and formulate an enforcement policy regarding illegal construction. A 2017 law increased the government's power to demolish unpermitted structures. New construction remained illegal in towns that did not have an authorized plan for development. Arab members of the Knesset and human rights organizations condemned the law for increasing enforcement and demolitions without addressing the systemic housing shortages in Arab communities that led to unpermitted construction. According to human rights organizations, approximately 50,000 Arab families lived in unpermitted houses.

Some NGOs criticized the lack of Arab representation on regional planning and zoning approval committees, and stated that planning for Arab areas was much slower than for Jewish municipalities, leading Arab citizens to build or expand their homes without legal authorization, thus risking a government-issued

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demolition order. Authorities issued approximately 1,770 administrative and judicial demolition orders during the year, overwhelmingly against Arab-owned structures. In cases of demolitions with no agreement from the residents to relocate, the government levied fines against residents to cover costs of demolitions.

A development plan for the Bedouin village of al-Fura'a was not completed as of the end of the year, despite government recognition of the village in 2006. As a result the village lacked basic electricity and water infrastructure, and NGOs reported house demolitions occurred regularly. The government stated that a team from the Ministry of Agriculture's Authority for the Development and Settlement of Bedouin in the Negev began working on this issue in the second half of 2018, after completing a survey of 180 Bedouin residential clusters.

Regarding 35 unrecognized Bedouin villages in the Negev inhabited by approximately 90,000 persons, the government stated it used a "carrot and stick" approach to attempt to compel Bedouin Israelis to move, including demolishing unpermitted structures and offering incentives to move to Bedouin towns. According to a State Comptroller report and information from NGOs, Bedouins often refused to participate because they asserted they owned the land or that the government had given them prior permission to settle in their existing locations. Bedouins also feared losing their traditional livelihoods and way of life, as well as moving onto land claimed by a rival Bedouin clan. The seven Bedouin townships in the Negev were all crowded, especially in comparison with the Jewish towns and cities in the area, and had low-quality infrastructure and inadequate access to services for health, education, welfare, public transportation, mail, and garbage disposal. According to the NGO Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality (NCF), Bedouins accounted for 34 percent of the population of the Negev, but only 12.5 percent of the residential-zoned land was designated for the Bedouin population.

As of 2019, approximately 31 percent of the 202,620 acres of Arab Bedouin land in the south of the country that was previously under ownership dispute was no longer in dispute as a result of either settlement agreements or following legal

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proceedings, according to the government.

In 2018 Bedouin residents of the unrecognized village Umm al-Hiran signed an agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture's Authority for the Development and Settlement of Bedouin in the Negev to demolish their structures and relocate to vacant plots in the Bedouin town of Hura, following extended legal action and negotiations. Umm al-Hiran was to be replaced with a Jewish community called Hiran. As of September 14, Bedouin residents still resided in the unrecognized village and the government announced it would formulate a solution for Umm al Hiran residents within three months.

The NCF recorded 2,241 demolitions of Bedouin Israelis' structures in 2019 and stated the demolition policy violated Bedouin Israelis' right to adequate housing. The NGO Regavim praised the demolitions as combatting illegal construction by squatters. Other civil society contacts stated the demolitions ignored traditional Bedouin seminomadic lifestyles predating the modern state of Israel.

In addition to the Negev, authorities ordered demolition of private property elsewhere, including in Arab towns and villages and in East Jerusalem, stating some structures were built without permits. B'Tselem reported that authorities demolished 121 housing units in East Jerusalem, and owners had demolished 81 units to avoid additional fines by the end of the year. This represented a decrease of 28 percent and an increase of 92 percent, respectively, with the number of owner demolitions the highest since B'Tselem began recording data in 2008. Legal experts pointed to the Kaminitz Law, which reduced administrative processing times for demolitions and increased administrative fines for those failing to demolish their own buildings, as a key factor in the increased number of demolitions in East Jerusalem. There were credible claims that municipal authorities in Jerusalem placed insurmountable obstacles to prevent Palestinian residents from obtaining construction permits, including failure to incorporate community needs into zoning decisions, the requirement that Palestinian residents document land ownership despite the absence of a uniform post-1967 land registration process, the imposition of high application fees, and requirements that new housing be connected to often nonexistent municipal utilities and other

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physical infrastructure.

In addition, NGOs asserted that there was a continuing policy intended to limit construction to prevent the creation or maintenance of contiguous neighborhoods between the West Bank and Jerusalem. Israeli official policy remained aimed at maintaining an ethnic balance between Jews and non-Jews in Jerusalem, according to civil society and official reports. The Israeli MFA said that the Jerusalem Municipality did not have any such policy. Israeli law no longer prevents non-Jews from purchasing housing units, although cultural, religious, and economic barriers to integrated neighborhoods remain, according to civil society representatives.

According to the government, all land ownership cases are assessed individually by an administrative committee, which is subject to judicial review.

According to Ir Amim and B'Tselem, discrimination is a factor in resolving disputes over land titles acquired before 1948. The law facilitates the resolution of claims by Jewish owners to land owned in East Jerusalem prior to 1948 but does not provide an equal opportunity for Palestinian claimants to land they owned in West Jerusalem or elsewhere in the British Mandate. Additionally, some Jewish and Palestinian landowners in Jerusalem were offered compensation by Israel for property lost prior to 1948. Civil society reports noted that many Palestinian landowners were deemed ineligible for compensation because they had to be residents of Jerusalem as of 1973. Other Palestinian landowners refused to accept compensation because they deemed it to be inadequate or in principle due to their rejection of Israeli administration. Jordanian authorities between 1948 and 1967 housed Palestinians in some property which Jewish owners reclaimed after Israel occupied East Jerusalem in 1967. Legal disputes continue regarding many of these properties involving Palestinian residents, who have some protection as tenants under Israeli law.

The Department of State's *Justice for Uncompensated Survivors Today (JUST) Act Report* to Congress, released publicly on July 29 may be found on the Department's website: <https://www.state.gov/reports/just-act-report-to-congress/>.

f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home,

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or Correspondence

The law prohibits such actions, and the government generally respected those prohibitions.

The 2003 Law of Citizenship and Entry, which is renewed annually, prohibits Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza, Iranians, Iraqis, Syrians, and Lebanese, including those who are Palestinian spouses of Israeli residents or citizens, from obtaining resident status unless the Ministry of the Interior makes a special determination, usually on humanitarian grounds. The government has extended the law annually due to government reports that Palestinian family reunification allows entry to a disproportionate number of persons who are later involved in acts of terrorism. HaMoked asserted that statistics from government documents obtained through Freedom of Information Act requests contradicted these terrorism allegations, and that denial of residency to Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza for the purposes of family reunification led to cases of family separation.

According to HaMoked 2018 reports, there were approximately 10,000 Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza living in Israel, including Jerusalem, on temporary stay permits because of the law, with no legal provision that would allow them to continue living with their families. There were also cases of Palestinian spouses living in East Jerusalem without legal status. Authorities did not permit Palestinians who were abroad during the 1967 war or whose residency permits the government subsequently withdrew to reside permanently in Jerusalem. Amnesty International and other human rights organizations called on the government to repeal this law and resume processing family unification applications. The law allows the entry of spouses of Israelis on a “staying permit” if the male spouse is age 35 or older and the female spouse is age 25 or older, for children up to age 14, and a special permit for children ages 14-18, but they may not receive residency and have no path to citizenship. According to the Israeli MFA, the Population & Immigration Authority received 886 family unification requests from East Jerusalem in 2020, and 616 in 2019. Of these 256 were in approved and 540 are pending from 2020, while 373 were approved and 41 pending from 2019.

On March 16, the government issued an emergency regulation based on the

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country's state of emergency, allowing the Shin Bet and police to track mobile phones to identify individuals in close contact with confirmed COVID-19 patients and to enforce quarantine orders. The government stated the program was the most effective way to maintain public health and economic stability. Some NGOs argued the regulations violated individual rights, including the right to privacy and dignity, and expressed concern regarding the role of the Shin Bet in monitoring the civilian population. They also questioned the effectiveness of the scheme, citing a low percentage of confirmed COVID-19 cases identified solely through the program and a reportedly high margin of error. On March 19, the Supreme Court issued an interim injunction that halted police tracking and subjected Shin Bet tracking to Knesset oversight. On April 26, the court ruled that the use of Shin Bet surveillance techniques must be authorized through legislation. On July 21, the Knesset passed a law allowing the government to utilize a limited version of the Shin Bet tracking program for 21 days at a time when there were more than 200 confirmed cases per day. On November 17, following an additional petition submitted by ACRI and Adalah on this issue, the Supreme Court ordered the government to explain further why Shin Bet tracking should be used in cases where COVID-19 patients are not cooperating with the epidemiological investigations, and why the government is not promoting an alternative method to Shin Bet tracking, as the law states. The petition was pending as of year's end.

On March 27, media outlet Yedioth Ahronoth reported that under the auspices of the Shin Bet Law, the Shin Bet had been collecting data from mobile phones of all users of telecom services in Israel for 18 years, including calls, messages, and locations.

On December 13, Haaretz reported that police demanded internet providers to integrate a system that diverts data on police suspects, or on individuals visiting a specific website or IP address, to a police-controlled system. On December 14, Adalah sent an urgent letter to the attorney general and to the minister of public security, demanding they freeze police use of this system and clarify its legality,

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purpose, and mode of operation.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for the Press

The law generally provides for freedom of expression, including for the press, and the government generally respected this right. An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to promote freedom of expression, including for the press.

The law imposes tort liability on any person who knowingly issues a public call for an economic, cultural, or academic boycott of the State of Israel or of institutions or entities in Israel or areas under its control in the West Bank. Plaintiffs must prove direct economic harm to claim damages under the law. The law also permits the finance minister to impose administrative sanctions on those calling for such a boycott, including restrictions on participating in tenders for contracts with the government and denial of government benefits.

The law bars entry to the country of visitors who called for boycotts, and in 2018 the Ministry of Strategic Affairs published a list of 20 organizations whose members would be refused entry. According to September 30 media reports, the Ministry of Interior permitted former Israeli citizen Dror Feiler, who participated in the 2010 Gaza flotilla and was banned from the country since 2010, entry to the country only upon deposit of a 100,000 shekel (\$30,600) bond.

Freedom of Speech: The law prohibits hate speech and content liable to incite to violence or discrimination on grounds of race, origin, religion, nationality, and gender. In cases of speech that are defined as incitement to violence or hate speech, the law empowers police to limit freedom of expression.

Conviction of desecrating the Israeli flag carries a maximum penalty of three years in prison and a monetary fine.

The law prohibits individuals or organizations that initiate political or legal action abroad against IDF soldiers or the state of Israel from holding activities in schools, but the Ministry of Education had not issued regulations necessary to implement

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the law as of year's end. Both supporters and opponents of the law stated it was intended to target the NGO Breaking the Silence (BTS), a group of military veterans whose goal is to end the Israeli occupation of the West Bank. BTS criticized the law as a violation of freedom of political expression.

Freedom of Press and Media, Including Online Media: Independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views without restriction, with a few exceptions.

Police regulations grant broad authorities to prevent journalists' access to violent incidents (i.e., riots, demonstrations, protests) if there exists a concern that the entry of journalists would lead to "special circumstances," such as risking the journalist's life, furthering violence, disrupting investigative procedures, violating privacy, or violating a closure order. Police must also consider alternatives to minimize the violation of press freedom, for instance by escorting journalists in and out of dangerous situations.

In April the Government Press Office requested journalists to refrain from reporting from ultra-Orthodox areas due to the Jewish holiday of Passover.

Violence and Harassment: Palestinian journalists who were able to obtain entry permits, as well as Jerusalem-based Arab journalists, reported incidents of harassment, racism, and occasional violence when they sought to cover news in Jerusalem, especially in the Old City and its vicinity. In June the Journalists' Support Committee, a nonprofit journalist advocacy organization, stated security forces committed more than 50 human rights violations against Palestinian journalists working in Jerusalem in the first half of the year, including arrests and expulsions from the city. In May the then public security minister Gilad Erdan extended for six months the closure order against Palestine TV's East Jerusalem office, according to media reports. In November 2019, Erdan first ordered the closure when police raided the office.

On June 10, Likud officials published a video using the party's official Twitter account calling for the imprisonment of Channel 13 News journalist Raviv Drucker for his coverage of Prime Minister Netanyahu's trial. Likud officials accused Drucker of extorting witnesses, broadcasting criminal leaks, and obstructing

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justice. On July 25, the prime minister took to Facebook to characterize Channel 12 as a propaganda tool against him and his government.

Following a March 15 COVID-19 emergency regulation allowing the Shin Bet to track civilian cell phones for contact tracing purposes, the Union of Journalists in Israel petitioned the Supreme Court to have its members excluded in order to preserve press freedom and protect journalist sources. On April 26, the Supreme Court ruled that a journalist identified as a COVID-19 patient could refuse being tracked by the Shin Bet and instead undergo a manual epidemiological investigation, whereby the journalist would not reveal their sources but commit to notifying health officials regarding their infection.

Police detained, used violence against, and confiscated equipment of journalists during demonstrations throughout the country. On June 8, police officers hit, shoved to the floor, and then detained Haaretz photojournalist Tomer Appelbaum at the end of a demonstration against the extension of Israeli sovereignty to the West Bank. Witnesses indicated that Appelbaum was clearly identified as a journalist; however, police stated they did not notice his press credentials until after the incident. On September 5, police detained two photojournalists, according to the Israeli NGO Human Rights Defenders Fund (HRDF), after the journalists recorded protesters moving police barriers during a demonstration outside of the prime minister's residence. Police stated they confiscated the equipment because the cameras contained evidence of an alleged crime committed by the protesters. The photographers and the association of journalists argued the material was privileged. On November 11, a magistrate court rejected the police request to use the footage as evidence, stating that in this case, the public interest of a free, effective, and objective press surpasses the public interest in the criminal investigation.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: All media organizations must submit to military censors any material relating to specific military issues or strategic infrastructure problems, such as oil and water supplies. Organizations may appeal the censor's decisions to the Supreme Court, and the censor may not appeal a court judgment.

News printed or broadcast abroad is subject to security censorship. The

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government regularly enacted restrictive orders on sensitive security information and continuing investigations, and required foreign correspondents and local media to abide by these orders. According to data provided by the armed forces through a Freedom of Information Act request by +972 *Magazine*, in 2019 the censor acted on 1,973 articles out of 8,127 articles submitted to it, and banned 202 articles.

According to the Seventh Eye media watchdog group, police automatically requested gag orders during investigations of certain crimes and complex cases, and only on rare occasions did police request rescinding of such orders before the completion of its work in a case. This policy, according to the Seventh Eye, began in 2015, when a former deputy head of Shin Bet began serving as police commissioner. The policy was continued by his successors.

While the government retained the authority to censor publications for security concerns, anecdotal evidence suggested authorities did not actively review the Jerusalem-based *al-Quds* newspaper or other Jerusalem-based Arabic publications. Editors and journalists from those publications, however, reported they engaged in self-censorship.

Libel/Slander Laws: According to HRDF, individuals and right-wing NGOs used defamation lawsuits to discourage public criticism of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank. For example, on July 13, the Samaria Regional Council sued head of the Zulat Institute Zehava Galon and former member of the Knesset for libel after she criticized on Twitter its granting of a certificate of honor to two settlers who in 2019 allegedly shot and killed a Palestinian attacker. According to B'Tselem, the settlers continued to shoot the Palestinian after he no longer posed a threat. In June an additional libel lawsuit against the Galon and B'Tselem NGOs and three individuals who tweeted on the incident was filed by Yehusha Sherman, who shot the attacker. The lawsuits continued at year's end.

National Security: The law criminalizes as “terrorist acts” speech supporting terrorism, including public praise of a terrorist organization, display of symbols, expression of slogans, and “incitement.” The law authorizes restrictions on the release of bodies of terrorists and their funerals to prevent “incitement to terror or

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identification with a terrorist organization or an act of terror.”

In 2017 the Supreme Court imposed restrictions on an ISA practice of summoning Israeli political activists suspected of “subversive” activity unrelated to terror or espionage for questioning under caution, indicating they might be charged with a crime. Such summoning may be carried out only after consultation with the legal advisor of the ISA. Police and the ISA must clarify that questioning is voluntary and the person summoned is not required to appear; and the ISA must clarify during questioning that the suspect’s statements may not be used in court for other proceedings.

Internet Freedom

The government monitored electronic communications for security purposes, and censored online content suspected as illegal according to domestic law. The law authorizes district court judges to restrict access to internet sites to prevent the commission of crimes. The Cyber Unit of the State Attorney’s Office further requested that content intermediary companies remove or restrict access to, on a voluntary basis, content and accounts suspected of violating domestic law. The Cyber Unit’s data showed the number of requests for content removal in 2019 increased by 37 percent from 2018. In approximately 90 percent of the 19,606 requests submitted, content intermediaries voluntarily removed content from their platforms. According to the Cyber Unit’s data, 76 percent of the requests were due to offenses related to a terror organization, and 22 percent were due to incitement offenses. A petition by ACRI and Adalah to the Supreme Court against the voluntary track program, arguing that the program violates freedom of expression and the right to due process, was pending as of the year’s end.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

There were few government restrictions on academic freedom or cultural events.

The law prohibits institutions that receive government funding from engaging in commemoration of the “Nakba,” or “catastrophe,” the term used by Palestinians to refer to the displacement of Palestinians during Israel’s 1948 War of Independence. Activities forbidden by the law include rejection of the existence of Israel as a “Jewish and democratic state” or commemorating “Israel’s

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Independence Day or the day on which the State was established as a day of mourning.”

In January the Rishon LeTzion municipality removed a civics teacher from his position, following complaints he had expressed “radical left-wing positions” in the classroom and on social media, although the latter was not addressed in his termination hearing. ACRI stated that such incidents could lead to self-censorship by teachers, which stands in contradiction to the mission of educators.

On August 19, Minister of Education Yoav Galant intervened in the bible studies curriculum by cutting out Jewish history satirical sketches from the television show HaYehudim Baim (The Jews are Coming), following a protest from nationalist Orthodox rabbis. On August 21, ACRI demanded that the attorney general instruct the minister that he has no authority to intervene in the school curriculum.

Authorities continued to provide an edited version of the Palestinian Authority (PA) curriculum that deleted certain information on Palestinian history and culture for schools in neighborhoods in East Jerusalem. Authorities sought to tie funding for those schools to the use of the Israeli curriculum (see the West Bank and Gaza report for concerns regarding incitement and anti-Semitism in PA textbooks). Some Palestinians expressed concern at what they perceived as Israeli efforts to impose Israeli views on these students. Others welcomed the Israeli curriculum, and the additional resources associated with it, as better preparing students in Jerusalem to work in the Israeli workforce, compared to lower-paying employment in PA-controlled areas in the West Bank or in manual labor and low-wage sectors in Israel.

The government maintained prohibitions on some prominent Jerusalem-based Palestinian institutions, such as the Jerusalem Chamber of Commerce and the Orient House, which had been the de facto Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) office. The government renewed a closure order for these and other institutions under a 1994 law which requires the PA to obtain Israeli permission to open a representative office or hold a meeting in areas Israel recognizes as under its sovereignty. The government likewise continued to shut down Palestinian institutions and cultural events in Jerusalem that the government stated had PA participation or support, incited violence against Israel, or had anti-Israel or other

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objectionable content. Israeli authorities stated they would also detain and ban PA-affiliated officials in Jerusalem from conducting PA-related activities. According to Haaretz, the Ministry of Public Security approved dozens of such orders during the year. PA officials publicly point to the 1993 letter sent by then Israeli foreign minister Shimon Peres to his Norwegian counterpart Johan Holst as proof of an agreement to allow Palestinian institutions and activities in East Jerusalem.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The law provides for the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The law provides for this right, and the government generally respected it.

A law passed in April and the subsequent COVID-19 emergency regulations permitted the continuation of demonstrations during the COVID-19 crisis with the stipulation that participants maintain social distancing, but in several instances police placed additional limitations on the ability of individuals to assemble for peaceful protest. On September 29, the Knesset passed an amendment to the law, which led to the limiting of the right to demonstrate to within one-half mile of one's home, in groups of 20 persons or fewer, for a period of 14 days. On October 12, following a petition against the law filed on September 30 at the Supreme Court, the government announced it would not extend the regulation limiting the ability to protest further than one-half mile from one's home beyond October 13. The government did not cancel the amendment, allowing it to reinstate the measure. The petition was pending at year's end.

Police issued fines for alleged violations of COVID-19 regulations during demonstrations against the prime minister. On April 14, police fined two demonstrators in Kfar Saba for illegally gathering. Protesters argued they remained seven feet apart during the protest and viewed the fines as police efforts to deter protected political activity. On July 26, media published a recording in which Jerusalem District Police Commander Doron Yadid told Minister of Public Security Amir Ohana, in response to Ohana's request for police intervention to quell political protests, that police fined 160 individuals for not wearing a mask

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during a demonstration near the prime minister's residence.

On November 24, the prosecution filed two indictments against antigovernment protesters. Authorities filed an indictment against Gonen Ben Yitzhak, one of the leaders of the Crime Minister protest group, on charges of illegal assembly and disrupting the activities of a police officer by lying under a water cannon to prevent it from being used against protesters during a July demonstration.

There were reports that police used excessive force in response to protests. For example, on August 22, during a demonstration near the prime minister's residence, Chief Superintendent Niso Guetta physically attacked protesters, including hitting a protester and dragging him on the ground, and hitting a photographer. Police arrested two protesters for allegedly attacking Guetta, but video footage showed Guetta's attack was unprovoked; the detained protesters were subsequently released. On November 29, the prosecution indicted Guetta for assault. Prosecutors dismissed additional complaints against Guetta due to lack of evidence.

Police used water cannons and "skunk water" to disperse demonstrations. Video footage from a July 24 demonstration outside of the prime minister's residence showed a water cannon spraying a protester in the face, despite police regulations that forbid this action. The Knesset's Internal Affairs and Environment Committee subsequently held hearings on police tactics during demonstrations and demanded the publication of a reformed police procedure regarding the use of water cannons. A protest group petition against the use of water cannons at demonstrations was deleted on September 9, given the Knesset committee's discussions. The police procedure published in September relaxed previous restrictions on the use of water cannons, according to Haaretz. Authorities used skunk water to disperse groups of ultra-Orthodox Jews demonstrating against military draft requirements. A 2018 petition against the use of skunk water in dense urban areas was deleted by the Supreme Court on August 19, following a change in police procedures limiting the use of the method. On December 23, an ultra-Orthodox activist petitioned for selective police use of skunk water.

In October, ACRI sent letters to the attorney general demanding the government halt police practices during demonstrations which limit the freedom of peaceful

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assembly, including crowd control during protest marches by restricting demonstrators to small areas, requesting protesters to show their identification cards and registering them, using private cell phones to video record demonstrations, and using undercover police officers to arrest demonstrators.

Freedom of Association

The law provides for this right, and the government generally respected it.

The law prohibits registration of an association or a party if its goals include denial of the existence of the State of Israel or of the democratic character of the state.

The law requires NGOs receiving more than one-half of their funding from foreign governments to state this fact in their official publications, applications to attend Knesset meetings, websites, public campaigns, and any communication with the public. The law allows a monetary fine for NGOs that violate these rules. The government had not taken legal action against any NGO for failing to comply with the law by the year's end.

Local NGOs, particularly those focused on human rights problems and critical of the government, asserted the government sought to intimidate them and prevent them from receiving foreign government funding (see section 5).

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

d. Freedom of Movement

The law provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights for citizens.

The government imposed restrictions on freedom of movement in order to curb the spread of COVID-19 through emergency regulations.

In-country Movement: The barrier that divided the majority of the West Bank from Israel also divided some communities in Jerusalem, affecting residents'

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access to places of worship, employment, agricultural lands, schools, and hospitals, as well as the conduct of journalism and humanitarian and NGO activities. For example, restrictions on access in Jerusalem had a negative effect on Palestinian patients and medical staff trying to reach the six Palestinian hospitals in East Jerusalem that offered specialized care, including delays at checkpoints lasting up to two hours. Authorities sometimes restricted internal movement in Palestinian neighborhoods of Jerusalem and Jerusalem's Old City and periodically blocked entrances to the East Jerusalem neighborhoods of Issawiya, Silwan, and Jabal Mukabber. The government stated that the barrier was needed for security reasons and that restrictions on movement in Jerusalem were temporary and implemented only when necessary for investigative operations, public safety, or public order, and when there was no viable alternative.

According to the NGO Kav LaOved, Ministry of Health COVID-19 guidelines prohibited migrant caregivers from leaving their place of work, which resulted in some caregivers working without any breaks. Following a request by the NGO, since May 8, a government regulation has permitted migrant caregivers to have their weekly day of rest outside of their employers' residence if they lived in an apartment without roommates, a requirement that these workers could not meet.

Foreign Travel: Citizens generally were free to travel abroad, provided they had no outstanding military obligations and no administrative restrictions. The government may bar citizens from leaving the country based on security considerations, unpaid debts, or unresolved divorce proceedings. Authorities do not permit any citizen to travel to any state officially at war with Israel without government permission. This restriction includes travel to Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen. The government limited foreign travel due to COVID-19, but it continued to allow the entry of citizens and Jewish visitors intending to study in religious schools known as yeshivas. The government kept the border with Egypt closed despite Egypt opening its crossings to foreign citizens on July 1. On September 23, a petition to the Supreme Court demanding the opening of this border was rejected.

The government requires all citizens to have a special permit to enter "Area A" in the West Bank (the area, according to the Interim Agreement, in which the PA exercises civil and security responsibility), but the government allowed Arab

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citizens of Israel access to Area A without permits. The government continued selective revocations of residency permits of some Palestinian residents of Jerusalem. This meant those residents could not return to reside in Jerusalem. Reasons for revocation included holding residency or citizenship of another country; living in another country, the West Bank, or Gaza for more than seven years; or, most commonly, being unable to prove a “center of life” (interpreted as full-time residency) in Jerusalem. The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs report that as of October 28 the Israeli government had revoked 17 residency permits in Jerusalem on the grounds of regulation 11A of Israel's Entry Regulations, regarding individuals who stayed outside of Israel for more than 7 years or have acquired Citizenship/ Permanent Residence Status outside of Israel. Some Palestinians who were born in Jerusalem but studied abroad reported losing their Jerusalem residency status; however, the government denied revoking residency status of anyone who left for the sole purpose of studying abroad. The government added that the residency of individuals who maintained an “affinity to Israel” would not be revoked and that former residents who wished to return to Israel could receive renewed residency status under certain conditions.

Palestinians possessing residency permits issued by the Israeli government, but no PA or Jordanian identity documents, needed special documents to travel abroad.

Citizenship: The law allows administrative courts to approve the minister of interior’s request for revocation of citizenship of a person on grounds of “breach of trust to the State of Israel” or following a conviction for an act of terror. The law grants the minister the authority to revoke permanent residency based on similar grounds. Legal appeals by Adalah and ACRI against the revocation of citizenships of two individuals convicted for an act of terror, which also questioned the constitutionality of the law itself, were pending as of the year’s end.

e. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons

Not applicable.

f. Protection of Refugees

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for

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Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, or other persons of concern, except as noted below. The government did not allow UNHCR access to monitor regularly the detention facility at Ben Gurion Airport.

Abuse of Migrants, Refugees, and Stateless Persons: Communities with large concentrations of African migrants were occasionally targets of violence. Additionally, government policies on the legality of work forced many refugees to work in “unofficial” positions, making them more susceptible to poor treatment and questionable work practices by their employers. The Population and Immigration Authority (PIBA), unlike police or the IPS, did not have an external body to which migrants could file complaints if subjected to violence, according to HRM.

On July 20, a district court acquitted IPS officer Ronen Cohen and IDF soldier Yaakov Shamba of charges of aggravated battery against Eritrean asylum seeker Haptom Zerhom in 2015. A security guard at the Beer Sheva central bus station shot Zerhom, mistaking him for a terrorist attacker following a terrorist attack moments earlier. Following the shooting, a group of onlookers beat Zerhom, who later died at the hospital. The security guard was not charged, and two additional individuals received reduced sentences following plea deals in 2018.

Refoulement: The government provided some protection against expulsion or return of refugees to countries where their lives or freedom could be threatened, and stated its commitment to the principle of nonrefoulement.

As of September 30, there were 31,012 irregular migrants and asylum seekers in the country, of whom 28,175 were from Eritrea or Sudan, according to PIBA.

The government offered incentives to irregular migrants to leave the country and go to Uganda, including a paid ticket and a stipend. The government claimed the third-country government provided for full rights under secret agreements with Israel, but NGOs and UNHCR confirmed that migrants who arrived at the destination did not receive residency or employment rights. From January 1 to September 30, a total of 663 irregular migrants departed the country under pressure, compared with 2,024 in 2019. NGOs claimed many of those who

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departed to other countries faced abuses in those countries and that this transfer could amount to refoulement.

Access to Asylum: The law provides for granting of asylum or refugee status. The government has established a system for providing protection to refugees, but it has rarely granted a refugee status. According to the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), out of 64,542 asylum requests submitted to PIBA in 2011-19, 39 requests (0.06 percent) were approved, and 121 (0.2 percent) were rejected following a full examination. Another 16,777 (26 percent) were rejected either outright or were in various expedited processes. A total of 34,624 requests (54 percent) are still pending. There were 12,941 requests (20 percent) closed due to departure or lack of cooperation.

The majority of asylum seekers received a “conditional release visa” that requires frequent renewal in only two locations throughout the country. The government provided these individuals with a limited form of group protection regarding freedom of movement, protection against refoulement, and some access to the labor market. Advocacy groups argued that most government policies were geared toward deterring the arrival of future asylum seekers by pressuring those already in the country to depart, either by leaving them with limited or no access to social and medical services or by not examining their asylum requests.

Irregular migrants subject to deportation, including those claiming but unable to prove citizenship of countries included in Israel’s nonrefoulement policy, were subjected to indefinite detention if they refused to depart after receiving a deportation order. At the end of 2018, there were 165 migrants with undetermined or disputed citizenship in detention.

According to HIAS, as of June 6, PIBA examined only 21 asylum requests of Eritrean citizens despite a 2019 government announcement that it would reexamine all requests from Eritrean asylum seekers, including 3,000 that were previously turned down. PIBA recognized seven Eritreans as refugees in the first half of the year, according to UNHCR. The government continued not to examine asylum claims of Sudanese citizens from Darfur, Nuba Mountains, and Blue Nile, despite a 2018 PIBA response to the Supreme Court regarding the need to reexamine and request additional information for 1,500 such claims. On August 31, the

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government informed the Supreme Court that the lack of political clarity regarding Sudan did not allow for the formation of criteria to examine requests and did not allow for a ruling on individual requests of Darfuris.

On October 13, the Supreme Court ruled that 600 Sudanese who were granted special protection status in 2007 would be considered refugees.

Palestinian residents of the West Bank who claimed to be in a life-threatening situation due to their sexual orientation or other reasons, such as domestic violence, did not have access to the asylum system in Israel; however, many of them resided in Israel without legal status. NGOs stated this situation left persons who claimed they could not return to the West Bank due to fear of persecution vulnerable to human trafficking, violence, and exploitation. Some lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) Palestinians were able to obtain from the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) a temporary permit allowing them to stay in Israel without authorization to work or to access social services. A Supreme Court petition by NGOs demanding these rights was pending as of the year's end. According to UNHCR, prior to the issuance of permits, COGAT requested proof of efforts to resettle in a third country. The government stated that COGAT examined the issue on a case-by-case basis. Following a HIAS administrative petition, on March 1, PIBA launched a program that allowed Palestinians recognized as trafficking victims to work in Israel.

On February 9, the Supreme Court ordered the government to recognize an Ivoirian family as refugees due to its minor daughters' fear of being subjected to female genital mutilation in Cote d'Ivoire, and placing the burden of proof regarding a residential alternative on the government.

The government did not accept initial asylum claims at airports.

Safe Country of Origin/Transit: PIBA applied a fast-track procedure to reject asylum applications from applicants from Georgia, Ukraine, and Russia, which the Ministry of the Interior determined were "safe" countries.

Freedom of Movement: The law allows the government to detain asylum seekers from countries to which government policy prohibits deportation for a period of

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three months. The government may detain, without trial and for an indefinite period, irregular migrants who were “implicated in criminal proceedings” (See section 1.d.).

Authorities prohibited asylum seekers released from detention after arrival in the country from residing in Eilat, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Petah Tikva, Netanya, Ashdod, and Bnei Brak--cities that already had a high concentration of asylum seekers.

Employment: Following a 2019 Supreme Court ruling, the government removed text stipulating “this is not a work visa” from the visas of Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers. According to HRM, employing asylum seekers remained a felony that is not enforced due to a government commitment to the Supreme Court. According to UNHCR, asylum seekers from countries not listed under Israel’s nonrefoulement policy were restricted from working for three to six months after submitting their requests if they did not have a visa before applying. Asylum seekers are prohibited from working on government contracts, including local government contracts for cleaning and maintenance, which often employed irregular migrants.

On April 23, the Supreme Court struck down a law that required employers to deduct 20 percent of an asylum seeker’s salary as an incentive to encourage their departure from the country. The court deemed the 20 percent deduction as unconstitutional, referring to it as a violation of the right to individual property of a population with little means and low salaries. The court kept in place an additional 16 percent deposit (equal to social benefits) paid solely by employers as an incentive for departure. In addition to halting the practice of salary deductions, the court ordered PIBA to return to asylum seekers the full amount deducted from their salaries within 30 days. The Supreme Court verdict came in response to a 2017 petition by NGOs. As of December, 14,473 asylum seekers received refunds totaling 210.5 million NIS (\$63.1 million). 3,445 asylum seekers had not yet applied for their refund by year’s end.

As of February, according to PIBA, a gap of 710 million shekels (\$217.6 million) existed between the funds deducted from asylum seekers’ salaries and the funds deposited for them by employers. According to Ministry of Labor information

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published by Haaretz on August 9, the ministry opened 60 investigation files against employers who deducted but did not deposit funds. Thirty employers received fines, and five criminal proceedings were launched, leading to one indictment.

According to advocacy groups, at least 70 percent of asylum seekers in Israel were left without a job due to COVID-19 and were ineligible for unemployment insurance or other social services.

The law bars migrants from sending money abroad, limits the amount they may take with them when they leave to minimum-wage earnings for the number of months they resided in the country, and defines taking additional money out of the country as a money-laundering crime.

Access to Basic Services: Legally recognized refugees received social services, including access to the national health-care system, but the government for the most part did not provide asylum seekers with public social benefits. Asylum seekers were able to enroll in a health-insurance program only through their employers. Without insurance through employers, or when employers did not arrange a private insurance policy for them as required by law, asylum seekers had access only to emergency care. The Ministry of Health offered medical insurance for minor children of asylum seekers for 120 shekels (\$37) per month, but children of undocumented migrants were excluded from this program. On November 30, the Supreme Court ordered the Ministry of Health to allow children of undocumented migrants to be covered by a national health-insurance policy, requested in a petition by the PHRI; however, according to the PHRI, the Ministry of Health continued to exclude these children. The government sponsored a mobile clinic and mother and infant health-care stations in south Tel Aviv, which were accessible to migrants and asylum seekers. Hospitals provided emergency care to migrants and treated them for COVID-19 but often denied follow-up treatment to those who failed to pay, according to the PHRI. Due to COVID-19, the sole government-funded provider of mental health services had to limit its services, which resulted in only 250 patients being served. Asylum seekers who were recognized as victims of trafficking were eligible for rehabilitation and care.

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The same eligibilities did not apply for victims of torture.

According to A.S.S.A.F, several municipalities illegally segregated children of asylum seekers and other children in schools and kindergartens. For example, the Petah Tikva municipality delayed registration of Eritrean children for specific kindergartens in order for its schools to fill up with other students, and thus for the municipality to place all Eritrean children together, separate from Israeli children. A July 7 administrative petition against the municipality by the organization, Haifa University, and ACRI resulted in placing 140 Eritrean children in integrated kindergartens. On November 19, the petitioners reached an agreement with the municipality and the Education Ministry according to which future registration of children would be done in an integrated manner, and registration conditions would be equal for all children.

Durable Solutions: There is no procedure for recognized refugees to naturalize. According to the Tel Aviv University Refugee Rights Clinic, only under exceptional humanitarian circumstances may a recognized refugee receive permanent residency.

Temporary Protection: The government provided temporary protection to individuals whom it did not recognize as refugees, or who may not qualify as refugees, primarily Eritrean and Sudanese irregular migrants as described above.

g. Stateless Persons

Despite being eligible for Israeli citizenship since 1981, an estimated 23,000 Druze living in territory captured from Syria in 1967 largely refused to accept it, and their status as Syrian citizens was unclear. They held Israeli identification cards, which listed their nationality as “undefined.”

Following cases of Bedouins having their citizenship revoked when arriving to receive services at the Ministry of Interior, on August 11, a PIBA official stated in a Knesset Internal Affairs Committee meeting that many of the 2,624 Bedouins whose citizenship had been erroneously revoked by the Ministry of Interior were unable to participate in national elections. According to the PIBA official, out of 500 Bedouins erroneously registered as Israelis since they were children of permanent residents, 362 were naturalized, 134 did not complete the process, and

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six were not naturalized for other reasons, including security.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The law provides citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage. Palestinian residents of Jerusalem and Druze of the Golan Heights who have permanent residency status may vote in municipal elections and seek some municipal offices, but that of mayor. They may not vote in general elections or serve in the Knesset.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: Observers considered the March 2 parliamentary elections free and fair. More than 71 percent of eligible voters cast ballots. During the March elections, observers noted minimal irregularities that had no impact on the final outcome.

After the Ministry of Interior retroactively canceled the citizenship of 2,624 Bedouin citizens, many of them were unable to participate in the national elections until their status was resolved (see section 2. g.).

Political Parties and Political Participation: The Basic Laws prohibit the candidacy of any party or individual that denies the existence of the State of Israel as the state of the Jewish people or the democratic character of the state or that incites racism. A political party may not be registered if its goals include support of an armed struggle, enemy state, or terror organization against Israel. Otherwise political parties operated without restriction or interference.

On January 29, the Central Election Commission (CEC) disqualified the candidacy of Joint List member of the Knesset Heba Yazbak, claiming she expressed support on social media for armed struggle. On February 9, the Supreme Court reversed the CEC decision and allowed Yazbak to run. NGOs and the Joint List of Arab parties claimed that the CEC sought to disqualify Arab candidates with the intention to delegitimize the political representation of Israel's Arab minority.

The Northern Islamic Movement, banned in 2015, continued its practice of

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boycotting national elections.

The law restricts the funding of individuals and groups that engage in “election activity” during the period of a national election, which is typically three months. The law’s sponsors described it as an effort to prevent organizations and wealthy individuals from bypassing election-funding laws, but some civil society organizations expressed concern the law would stifle political participation.

The law allows dismissal of a member of the Knesset if 90 of 120 Knesset members vote for expulsion, following a request of 70 MKs, including at least 10 from the opposition. The party of an expelled member may replace the member with the next individual on its party list, and the expelled member may run in the next election. Joint List member of the Knesset Yousef Jabareen and some NGOs argued the government intended the law to target Arab legislators and that it harmed democratic principles such as electoral representation and freedom of expression.

In the period preceding the March elections, the NGO Adalah demanded that the CEC and the Ministry of Interior set up polling stations for Arab Bedouin citizens in the unrecognized villages in the Negev or provide the voters with transportation to their assigned polling stations. Authorities denied the request.

Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups: No laws limit participation of women or members of minority groups in the political process, and they did participate. The law provides an additional 15 percent in campaign funding to municipal party lists composed of at least one-third women. Women and minorities participated widely in politics, although their representation in the Knesset remained low. Of the 120-member Knesset, there were 30 women members and 20 members from ethnic or religious minorities (11 Muslims, five Druze, two Ethiopian-Israelis, and two Christians). As of December the government’s 36-member cabinet included seven women, one of whom was Ethiopian-Israeli. There were no Arabs. Four members of the 15-member Supreme Court were women, and one was Arab. Of the 257 mayors and local council heads, 14 were women.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in

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Government

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government generally implemented the law effectively. There were reports of government corruption, although impunity was not a problem.

Corruption: The government continued to investigate and prosecute top political figures. In 2019 Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit decided to indict Prime Minister Netanyahu for allegedly taking a bribe, fraud, and breach of trust, related to regulation of a telecommunications company. The indictment also covered an alleged attempt to direct authorities to suppress media coverage in exchange for favorable press, and the alleged receipt of inappropriate gifts. On May 24, the prime minister's trial in the Jerusalem District Court began. On January 26, the attorney general decided to indict member of the Knesset David Bitan for taking a bribe, fraud, and breach of trust in nine cases between 2011 and 2017.

Former minister Haim Katz was indicted for separate offenses of bribery, fraud, and breach of trust. Minister of Interior Aryeh Deri and Deputy Minister of Housing and Construction Yakov Litzman are both, separately, under investigation for various alleged offenses.

The law prohibits police from offering a recommendation whether to indict a public official when transferring an investigation to prosecutors. The attorney general or state prosecutor may ask police for a recommendation, however. Detectives or prosecutors convicted of leaking a police recommendation or an investigation summary may be sentenced to up to three years' imprisonment. The law does not apply to investigations in process at the time of the law's passage.

The NGO Lawyers for Good Governance, which combats corruption in Israel's 85 Arab municipalities, reported that it received 934 corruption-related complaints in 2019 through its hotline, up 20 percent from 2018. The NGO stated that during 2019 it prevented 48 senior staff appointments on the basis of nepotism or hiring without a public announcement.

Financial Disclosure: Senior officials are subject to comprehensive financial disclosure laws, and the Civil Service Commission verifies their disclosures.

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According to the NGO Shakuf, 12 ministers and deputy ministers, including the prime minister, did not submit their financial disclosure reports. Authorities do not make information in these disclosures public without the consent of the person who submitted the disclosure. There is no specific criminal sanction for noncompliance.

Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

A variety of Israeli, Palestinian, and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were generally responsive to their views, and parliamentarians routinely invited NGOs critical of the government to participate in Knesset hearings on proposed legislation. The government stated it made concerted efforts to include civil society in the legislative process, in developing public policy, and in a variety of projects within government ministries, but it did not cooperate with human rights organizations that it deemed “politically affiliated.” Human rights NGOs have standing to petition the Supreme Court directly regarding governmental policies and may appeal individual cases to the Supreme Court.

Domestic NGOs, particularly those focused on human rights issues, continued to view the law requiring disclosure of support from foreign entities on formal publications as an attempt to stigmatize, delegitimize, and silence them. Supporters of the legislation described it as a transparency measure to reveal foreign government influence. Critics noted the law targeted only foreign government funding, without requiring organizations to report funding from private foreign sources.

The law mandates additional scrutiny of requests for National Service volunteers from NGOs that receive more than one-half of their funding from foreign governments. Following a change to the law in 2017, NGOs such as Kav LaOved, which had been able to employ national service volunteers for years, were no

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longer permitted to do so.

The staffs of domestic NGOs, particularly those calling for an end to the country's military presence in and occupation of the West Bank and NGOs working for the rights of asylum seekers, stated they received death threats from nongovernmental sources. These threats spiked when government officials spoke out against the NGOs' activities or criticized them as enemies or traitors for opposing government policy.

On October 12, the Supreme Court rejected Israeli organization Ad Kan's petition to open a criminal investigation against NGO BTS for suspected espionage based on BTS's collections of testimonies from IDF soldiers. The Supreme Court's ruling came after the IDF and the prosecution found there was no need for an investigation, and after the attorney general rejected Ad Kan's appeal on the matter. According to BTS, Ad Kan's activities--including an attempt to infiltrate and mislead BTS in 2015--were attempts to delegitimize and silence BTS.

On March 25, Amnesty International submitted a petition to a district court demanding removal of a travel ban against its West Bank campaigner Laith Abu Zeyad imposed in October 2019 for undisclosed "security reasons." According to Amnesty International, the travel ban is a punitive measure against the organization's human rights work. Abu Zeyad's permit to enter Israel has not been renewed since May 2019.

In March, Minister of Justice Amir Ohana barred the coordinator of the Israeli Ministry of Justice's National Anti-Racism Unit, Kobi Aweke Zena, from participating in an ACRI conference. The minister argued that ACRI is political, controversial, and finances the legal fees to defend alleged terrorists in court. The minister took this action despite several attorney general letters since 2017 attesting to the legitimacy of ACRI as an established civil society organization. On August 9, the attorney general's office affirmed in response to an ACRI letter the importance in maintaining dialogue between civil society and state authorities, including through public servant participation in NGO-sponsored conferences and events.

The United Nations or Other International Bodies: The government generally

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cooperated with the United Nations and other international bodies. The country withdrew from UNESCO in 2018. The government continued its policy of nonengagement with the UN Human Rights Council's "special rapporteur on the situation in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967." On February 12, the government suspended relations with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), following publication of a United Nations Human Rights Council database of companies and "business activities related to settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory." OHCHR staff told news outlet the Middle East Eye that since June the government had not extended OHCHR staff visas due to the suspension of relations and that, as of October 15, nine of the 12 OHCHR foreign staff had left the country. Seventeen human rights and civil society organizations in Israel sent a letter on October 20 to the minister of foreign affairs demanding that the ministry reverse its measures against OHCHR and resume issuing visas.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The state comptroller served as ombudsman for human rights problems. The ombudsman investigated complaints against statutory bodies subject to audit by the state comptroller, including government ministries, local authorities, government enterprises and institutions, government corporations, and their employees. The ombudsman is entitled to use any relevant means of inquiry and has the authority to order any person or body to assist in the inquiry.

Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape, including spousal rape, is a felony for which conviction is punishable by 16 years' imprisonment. Conviction of rape under aggravated circumstances or rape committed against a relative is punishable by 20 years' imprisonment. Killing a spouse following abuse is chargeable as murder under aggravated circumstances, with a sentence if convicted of life imprisonment. Authorities generally enforced the law.

In 2019 the number of requests for assistance related to rape to the Association for

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Rape Crisis Centers was 13 percent higher than in 2018. Authorities opened 1,386 investigations of suspected rape in 2019, compared with 1,480 in 2018.

Authorities closed 92 percent of rape cases in 2019 without filing an indictment, mainly due to lack of evidence.

On September 2, police filed indictments against 11 men, including eight minors, for their involvement in the gang rape of a 16-year-old girl in Eilat. The indictments included rape under aggravated circumstances, aiding and abetting a rape, indecent assault, and failure to prevent a felony. The trial continued at year's end.

During the year 16 women and girls were killed by their male partners or by other family members. According to police data provided to the Movement for Freedom of Information, 77 percent of domestic assault cases from 2016-19 did not lead to an indictment, and 30,756 cases out of 39,867 cases closed without an indictment.

According to Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Social Services data, the number of reports of domestic violence almost tripled from March-October, compared with the same period in 2019. During the country's first lockdown due to COVID-19, calls to police regarding violence against women increased by 19 percent from March-May compared with the same period in 2019, according to police data obtained by the Movement for Freedom of Information.

The Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Social Services operated 14 shelters for survivors of domestic abuse, including two for the Arab community, two mixed Jewish-Arab shelters, two for the ultra-Orthodox community, and eight for non-ultra-Orthodox-Jewish communities. On May 3, the ministry opened an additional shelter to accommodate women under mandatory quarantine. The ministry also operated a hotline for reporting abuse, and on April 30, it opened a text-message-based hotline to help women access assistance while quarantined with an abusive partner. During the COVID-19 crisis, the Ministry of Justice's Legal Aid Department represented women seeking restraining and safety orders, and defended them in domestic violence cases.

Sexual Harassment: Sexual harassment is illegal. Penalties for sexual harassment depend on the severity of the act and whether the harassment involved

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blackmail. The law provides that victims may follow the progress on their cases through a computerized system and information call center. In 2019 prosecutors filed 104 indictments for sexual harassment, down from 168 in 2018. According to a Civil Service Commission report, in 2019 there were 214 sexual harassment complaints submitted to its Department of Discipline, compared with 194 complaints in 2018 and 168 in 2017. During 2019 the commission submitted 15 lawsuits to its disciplinary tribunal, compared with 12 in 2018.

On February 10, a magistrate court sentenced former Jerusalem district police chief Niso Shaham to 10 months' imprisonment, eight months' probation, a fine, and a compensation payment for sexually harassing female officers under his command. On July 14, a district court rejected Shaham's appeal to overturn the magistrate court's decision. Shaham appealed to the Supreme Court, and the appeal continued at year's end.

Reproductive Rights: Couples and individuals have the right to decide the number, spacing, and timing of the birth of their children. Generally all individuals have the right to manage their reproductive health and had access to the information and means to do so, free from discrimination, coercion, or violence. According to NGOs, Arab Israeli women, particularly from the Bedouin population; female asylum seekers; and Palestinian women from East Jerusalem had limited access to health-care services. Traditional practices in Orthodox Jewish communities often led women to seek approval from a rabbi to use contraception.

The country maintained a pronatalist policy regarding reproductive care, subsidizing fertility treatments until the age of 45 but for the most part not subsidizing contraceptives, with the exception of women younger than age of 20 and women in the IDF.

The government provided sexual and reproductive health services for survivors of sexual violence. On February 9, the Supreme Court ordered the government to recognize an Ivoirian family as refugees due to its minor daughters' fear of being subjected to female genital mutilation in Cote d'Ivoire.

Coercion in Population Control: There were no reports of coerced abortion or

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involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

Discrimination: The law provides generally for the same legal status and rights for women as for men, including under family, religious, personal status, and national laws, as well as laws related to labor, property, inheritance, employment, access to credit, and owning or managing business property. The government generally enforced the law effectively, but a wage gap between women and men persisted. Women and men are treated differently in Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Druze religious courts responsible for adjudication of family law, including marriage and divorce. For example, although women served as judges in nonreligious courts, they are barred from serving as judges in rabbinical courts.

The law allows a Jewish woman or man to initiate divorce proceedings, and both the husband and wife must give consent to make the divorce final. Sometimes a husband makes divorce contingent on his wife conceding to demands, such as those relating to property ownership or child custody. Jewish women in this situation could not remarry and any children born to them from another man would be deemed illegitimate by the Rabbinate without a writ of divorce. Rabbinical courts sometimes punished a husband who refused to give his wife a divorce, while also stating they lacked the authority under Jewish religious law to grant the divorce without his consent.

A Muslim man may divorce his wife without her consent and without petitioning the court. A Muslim woman may petition for and receive a divorce through the sharia courts without her husband's consent under certain conditions. A marriage contract may provide for other circumstances in which she may obtain a divorce without his consent. Through ecclesiastical courts, Christians may seek official separations or divorces, depending on their denomination. Druze divorces are performed by an oral declaration of the husband or the wife and then registered through the Druze religious courts.

In some ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods, private organizations posted "modesty signs" demanding women obscure themselves from public view to avoid distracting devout men. The Beit Shemesh municipality received several extensions from the Supreme Court, which ordered it to remove such signs in

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2018.

Women's rights organizations reported a continuing trend of gender segregation and women's exclusion, including in public spaces and events, in the IDF and in academia. In academia segregation in classes originally meant to accommodate the ultra-Orthodox population expanded to entrances, labs, libraries, and hallways, based on the Council of Higher Education inspections, revealed through a Freedom of Information Act request. Petitions to the Supreme Court regarding segregation in the academia were under review at year's end. Incidents of segregation were also reported in government and local authorities' events and courses. For example, the Ministry of Transportation prevented women from registering for some men-only defensive driving courses. In June the Ministry of Transportation committed to halt this practice, following a 2018 lawsuit by the Israel Women's Network.

Children

Birth Registration: Regardless of whether they are born inside or outside of the country, children derive citizenship at birth if at least one parent is a citizen, provided the child resides with the parent who is a citizen or permanent resident. Births should be registered within 10 days of delivery. Births are registered in the country only if the parents are citizens or permanent residents. Any child born in an Israeli hospital receives an official document from the hospital that affirms the birth.

On July 26, the Supreme Court rejected a petition of a same-sex couple who demanded to make the process of registering parenthood for lesbian couples equal to that of heterosexual couples. The Israel LGBTI Task Force criticized the ruling and stated that the government chose to continue wrongful discrimination, which led to what the Task Force called "bureaucratic torture." A petition by 34 lesbian mothers against the Ministry of Interior's refusal to list nonbiological mothers on birth certificates, despite court-issued parenting orders, was pending at year's end. For children of nonresident parents, including those who lack legal status in the country, the Ministry of the Interior issues a confirmation of birth document, which is not a birth certificate. The Supreme Court confirmed in a 2018 ruling that the ministry does not have the authority to issue birth certificates for nonresidents

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under existing law.

The government registers the births of Palestinians born in Jerusalem, although some Palestinians who have experienced the process reported that administrative delays may last for years. The St. Yves Society estimated that more than 10,000 children in East Jerusalem remained undocumented.

According to the NGO Elem, the number of homeless youth increased by 50 percent in the first three months of the COVID-19 outbreak compared with the same period in 2019.

Education: Primary and secondary education is free and universal through age 17 and compulsory through grade 12.

The government did not enforce compulsory education in unrecognized Bedouin villages in the Negev. Bedouin children, particularly girls, continued to have the highest illiteracy rate in the country, and more than 5,000 kindergarten-age children were not enrolled in school, according to the NCF. The government did not grant construction permits in unrecognized villages, including for schools.

Following the nationwide closure of schools in March due to COVID-19, NGOs stated that approximately 50,000 Bedouin students were left without access to distance learning for lack of access to computers and tablets, as well as their schools lacking access to funding and infrastructure to implement Ministry of Health hygiene and social distancing regulations.

There were reportedly insufficient classrooms to accommodate schoolchildren in Jerusalem. Based on population data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, the NGO Ir Amim estimated in previous years a shortage of 2,500 classrooms for Palestinian children who are residents in East Jerusalem, and 18,600 Palestinian children in Jerusalem were not enrolled in any school.

The government operated separate public schools for Jewish children, in which classes were conducted in Hebrew, and for Arab children, with classes conducted in Arabic. For Jewish children separate public schools were available for religious and secular families. Individual families could choose a public school system for

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their children to attend regardless of ethnicity or religious observance.

The government funded approximately 34 percent of the Christian school system budget and restricted the schools' ability to charge parents tuition, according to church officials. The government offered to fund Christian schools fully if they become part of the public (state) school system, but the churches continued to reject this option, citing concerns that they would lose control over admissions, hiring, and use of church property.

Jewish schoolgirls continued to be denied admission to ultra-Orthodox schools based on their Mizrahi ethnicity (those with ancestry from North Africa or the Middle East) despite a 2009 court ruling prohibiting ethnic segregation of Mizrahi and Ashkenazi schoolgirls, according to the NGO Noar Kahalacha.

There is no Arabic-language school for a population of approximately 3,000 Arab students in Nof Hagalil (formerly Nazareth Ilit), a town where 26 percent of residents are Arab. As a result most Arab students there attended schools in Nazareth and nearby villages. An NGO petition seeking the establishment of an Arabic-language school remained pending at year's end.

Child Abuse: The law requires mandatory reporting of any suspicion of child abuse. It also requires social service employees, medical and education professionals, and other officials to report indications that minors were victims of, engaged in, or coerced into prostitution, sexual offenses, abandonment, neglect, assault, abuse, or human trafficking. The Ministry of Education operated a special unit for sexuality and for prevention of abuse of children and youth that assisted the education system in prevention and appropriate intervention in cases of suspected abuse of minors. In 2019 the Knesset approved a law extending the statute of limitations on serious crimes against children from 10 to 15 years.

In its annual report, the National Council for the Child (NCC) recorded a 40 percent increase in the number of children at risk of suicide who have been treated by educational psychologists. The report also showed double the number of reports of suspected violence against children (from 609 in 2019 to 1,225). There was a drop from 302 reports in 2019 to 240 reports to school psychologists of children in isolation on suspicion of neglect. The NCC highlighted difficulties

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with studies, anxiety, and emotional distress among schoolchildren; nearly one-third of Israeli school children did not participate regularly in online learning, or did not have access to online learning. The reported noted that more than one-half of Arab students and approximately 35 percent of students in Jewish schools did not have access to a computer for distance learning.

According to local government officials and human rights organizations, Gaza fence protests, air-raid sirens, and rocket attacks led to psychological distress among children living near Gaza, including nightmares and posttraumatic stress disorder.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The law sets the minimum age of marriage at 18, with some exceptions for minors due to pregnancy and for couples older than age 16 if the court permitted it due to unique circumstances. Some Palestinian girls were coerced by their families into marrying older men who were Arab citizens of Israel, according to government and NGO sources. On September 17, the Supreme Court ordered police to reexamine a request of a Bedouin woman--a victim of two early and forced marriages who killed her second husband--to be recognized as a trafficking victim. The court ruled that while forced marriages do not constitute a trafficking offense in and of themselves, there is a possibility that such marriages would constitute trafficking if their purpose was to allow for sexual exploitation or forced labor, or if they placed an individual at risk of becoming a victim of these offenses.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law prohibits sexual exploitation of a minor and sets a penalty for conviction of seven to 20 years in prison. The law prohibits the possession of child pornography (by downloading) and accessing such material (by streaming). Authorities enforced the law. The Ministry of Public Security operated a hotline to receive complaints of activities that seek to harm children online, such as bullying, dissemination of hurtful materials, extortion, sexual abuse, and pressure to commit suicide.

The minimum age for consensual sex is 16. Consensual sexual relations with a minor between ages 14 and 16 constitute statutory rape for which conviction is

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punishable by five years' imprisonment.

International Child Abductions: The country is a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. See the Department of State's report *Annual Report on International Parental Child Abduction* at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data/reported-cases.html>.

Anti-Semitism

Jews constituted close to 75 percent of the population, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics. The government often treated crimes targeting Jews as nationalistic crimes relating to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict rather than as resulting from anti-Semitism.

The government has laws and mechanisms in place regarding claims for the return of or restitution for Holocaust-era assets. Relevant laws refer to assets imported during World War II whose owners did not survive the war. Unclaimed assets were held in trust and not transferred to legal inheritors, who in most cases were not aware that their late relatives had property in Israel.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Persons with Disabilities

The law protects the rights of persons with disabilities, including their access to education, employment, health services, information, communications, buildings, transportation, the judicial system, and other government services. The government generally enforced these laws. The law states that by the end of 2019, all public services must be provided from buildings or spaces accessible to persons with disabilities, excluding local authority buildings built before 2019, which should be made accessible by November 2021. The law allows for a one-year extension to the deadline. The Government Housing Administration predicted in November that by the end of the year 62 percent of public buildings would be

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accessible for individuals with disabilities. The Ministry of Justice published a memo in November, however, that proposed postponing the deadline to the end of 2021, with provision for another one-year extension. The law requires that at least 5 percent of employees of every government agency with more than 100 workers be persons with disabilities. In 2019, according to a report by the Commission for Equal Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 60 percent of government agencies met this requirement. Government ministries had not developed regulations regarding the accessibility of health services, roads, sidewalks, and intercity buses by the end of the year.

According to the Civil Society Forum for the Advancement of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Israel, Arab persons with disabilities suffer from a higher percentage of inaccessible public buildings and spaces, due to lack of funding. They also lack access to information in Arabic from the government regarding their rights.

On May 30, a border police officer in Jerusalem chased and then shot and killed Iyad Halak, a Palestinian man with autism, after he had failed to heed calls to stop (see section 1.a.).

Members of National/Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups

Arab Muslims, Christians, Druze, and Ethiopian citizens faced persistent institutional and societal discrimination.

There were multiple instances of security services or other citizens racially profiling Arab citizens. Some Arab civil society leaders described the government's attitude toward the Arab minority as ambivalent; others cited examples in which Israeli political leaders incited racism against the Arab community or portrayed it as an enemy.

In 2018 the Knesset passed a basic law referred to as the Nation State Law. The law changes Arabic from an official language, which it had been since Israel adopted prevailing British Mandate law in 1948, to a language with a "special status." The law also recognizes only the Jewish people as having a national right of self-determination and calls for promotion of "Jewish settlement" within Israel, which Arab organizations and leaders feared would lead to increased

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discrimination in housing and legal decisions pertaining to land. Druze leaders criticized the law for relegating a minority in the country to second-class-citizen status. Opponents also criticized the law for not mentioning the principle of equality to prevent harm to the rights of non-Jewish minorities.

Supporters of the law stated it was necessary to anchor the country's Jewish character in a basic law to balance the 1992 Basic Law on Human Dignity and Liberty, which protected individual rights. Supporters noted the Supreme Court had already interpreted the 1992 law as mandating equality. Supporters argued that the Human Dignity and Liberty law continues to safeguard individual civil rights. Political leaders conceded that the criticisms of the Druze community must be addressed. Multiple lawsuits challenging the Nation State Law remained pending with the Supreme Court at year's end.

On October 1, the PHRI published a report based on Central Bureau of Statistics data and surveys indicating significant health gaps between Jewish and Arab populations. The Arab population was found to be lagging behind in life expectancy, infant mortality, morbidity, self-assessed health, diabetes, obesity, smoking rates and more. The report's findings point to gaps, sometimes significant, in the quality of health-care services provided to the country's Arab residents compared to Jewish residents. These gaps emerged particularly with respect to primary care in the community and to a much lesser degree in terms of specialist care. In March further gaps emerged with respect to the government's response to the coronavirus pandemic.

On June 4, several Jewish Israelis attacked Muhammad Nasasrah, allegedly after they heard him speak Arabic. Joint List Member of Knesset Ahmad Tibi criticized police for failing to investigate the incident. On October 22, police arrested three suspects, and on November 5, the prosecution filed an indictment against the three suspects for "assault under aggravated circumstances."

Throughout the year there were "price tag" attacks, which refer to violence by Jewish individuals and groups against Palestinians and Arab citizens of Israel and property with the stated purpose of exacting a "price" for actions taken by the government against the attackers' interests. The government classifies any association using the phrase "price tag" as an illegal association and a price tag

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attack as a security (as opposed to criminal) offense. The most common offenses, according to police, were attacks on vehicles, defacement of real estate, harm to Muslim and Christian holy sites, assault, and damage to agricultural lands. On February 11, for example, 170 cars were vandalized and graffiti was sprayed on a mosque and on walls in Gush Halav saying “Jews wake up” and “stop intermarrying.” On January 24, unknown perpetrators set fire to a mosque in the Sharafat neighborhood of Jerusalem in a suspected hate crime, according to media reports. Graffiti sprayed on the side of the mosque indicated the suspected arson was related to an unpermitted West Bank outpost, portions of which the Israeli Border Police demolished on January 15.

On May 18, a district court convicted Amiram Ben Uliel on three murder charges, two attempted murder charges, arson, and conspiracy to commit a crime motivated by racism, for his role in an arson attack in Duma in 2015 that killed a Palestinian couple and their infant. On September 14, the court sentenced Ben Uliel to three life sentences plus 20 years and ordered him to pay a fine. Ben Uliel appealed the conviction to the Supreme Court, which was pending at year’s end. On September 16, as part of a plea bargain, the Supreme Court convicted and sentenced a minor who involved in arson and additional hate crimes to three and a half years in prison.

The government employed an “appropriate representation” policy for non-Jewish minorities in the civil service. The percentage of Arab employees in the public sector was 12.2 percent (61.5 percent of whom were entry-level employees), according to the Civil Service Commission. The percentage of Arab employees in the 62 government-owned companies was approximately 2.5 percent; however, during the year Arab citizens held 12 percent of director positions in government-owned companies, up from 1 percent in 2000, and Arab workers held 11 percent of government positions, up from 5 percent in 2000, according to the nonpartisan NGO Association for the Advancement of Civic Equality (Sikkuy).

Separate school systems within the public and semipublic domains produced a large variance in education quality. Arab, Druze, and ultra-Orthodox students passed the matriculation exam at lower rates than their non-ultra-Orthodox-Jewish counterparts. The government continued operating educational and scholarship programs to benefit Arab students. Between the academic year of 2009-10 and

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2020, the percentage of Arab students enrolled increased significantly: in the undergraduate programs from 13 percent to 19 percent, in master's degree programs from 7 percent to 15 percent, and in doctoral programs from 5 percent to 7 percent, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics.

Approximately 93 percent of land is in the public domain. This includes approximately 12.5 percent owned by the Jewish National Fund (JNF), whose statutes prohibit sale or lease of land to non-Jews. Arab citizens are allowed to participate in bids for JNF land, but the Israel Lands Administration (ILA) grants the JNF another parcel of land whenever an Arab citizen of Israel wins a bid. In 2018 the Supreme Court ruled that the Lands Administration Executive Council must have representation of an Arab, Druze, or Circassian member to prevent discrimination against non-Jews; however, there were no members from these groups on the executive council at year's end.

The Bedouin segment of the Arab population continued to be the most socioeconomically disadvantaged. More than one-half of the estimated 260,000 Bedouin citizens in the Negev lived in seven government-planned towns. In nine of 11 recognized villages, all residences remained unconnected to the electricity grid or to the water infrastructure system, according to the NCF. Nearly all public buildings in the recognized Bedouin villages were connected to the electricity grid and water infrastructure, as were residences that had received a building permit, but most residences did not have a building permit, according to the government. Each recognized village had at least one elementary school, and eight recognized villages had high schools.

Approximately 90,000 Bedouins lived in 35 unrecognized tent or shack villages without access to any government services (see section 1.e. for issues of demolition and restitution for Bedouin property).

The government generally prohibited Druze citizens and residents from visiting Syria. The government has prevented family visitations to Syria for noncitizen Druze since 1982.

An estimated population of 155,300 Ethiopian Jews experienced persistent societal discrimination, although officials and citizens quickly and publicly criticized

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discriminatory acts against them.

On February 4, the DIPO submitted an indictment charging an off-duty police officer who shot and killed 18-year-old Selomon Teka in June 2019 with negligence. His trial continued at year's end.

On February 12, the Supreme Court ordered police to explain why the court should not cancel a procedure allowing police to demand identification without reasonable suspicion, which leads to racial profiling and the targeting of Ethiopian-Israelis and other minority populations. The case continued at year's end.

The IDF Ombudsman's annual report for 2019 highlighted cases of racism towards Ethiopian soldiers from their commanders.

The Anti-Racism Coordinating Government Unit worked to combat institutional racism by receiving complaints and referring them to the relevant government authorities, and by raising public awareness. For example, following a complaint, the Legal Aid Department in the Ministry of Justice submitted a lawsuit to a magistrate court against an owner of a bed-and-breakfast who refused to host Ethiopians because of their race. The lawsuit demanded 131,800 shekels (\$40,300) in compensation. The magistrate court had yet to issue a ruling by the year's end.

Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

The law prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, including in goods, services, and employment. The government generally enforced the law, although some discrimination in employment and housing persisted against LGBTQI+ persons in general and against transgender persons in particular. On April 20, a magistrate court ordered a company that refused to print materials with LGBTQI+ content for the Israel LGBTI Task Force to compensate the organization.

The trial against two individuals on charges of attempted murder of their 16-year-old brother, whom they stabbed outside an LGBTQI+ youth shelter in 2019, allegedly on the basis of his sexual orientation, was pending at year's end. Some violent incidents against LGBTQI+ individuals during the year led to arrests and

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police investigations. For example, on August 12, police indicted two minors for assault and causing injury under aggravated circumstances to LGBTQI+ minors in Jaffa on August 1.

On February 4, then minister of education Rafi Peretz announced he would grant an Israel Prize for Torah literature to Rabbi Yaacov Ariel, the former rabbi of Ramat Gan, who made public statements against LGBTQI+ persons, including a 2014 call not to rent apartments to lesbian couples. On April 26, the Supreme Court rejected a petition filed by the Israel LGBTI Taskforce against the granting of the prize to Ariel, stating the case did not justify the court's intervention. Ariel refused to retract his statements.

LGBTQI+ activists were able to hold public events and demonstrations but were restricted by COVID-19 emergency regulations limiting such participation (see section 2.b.).

IPS regulations prohibit holding transgender prisoners in solitary confinement. According to ACRI, one transgender woman was held in a separation wing used as a punitive measure for women removed from regular wings, for more than one year. In September she was transferred to a regular wing, following legal work by ACRI.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

Discrimination against persons with HIV is illegal and, according to the Israel AIDS Task Force, institutional discrimination was rare. The AIDS task force received some complaints during the year regarding discrimination in the provision of alternative health care and cosmetic services. According to a poll conducted by the task force in November, social stigma remained a problem.

Following a two-year pilot program to accept blood donations from gay and bisexual men, the Ministry of Health stores blood donations from a gay or bisexual man until the man donates blood again four months later. If both donations pass

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routine screening tests, including for absence of HIV, both are be accepted.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

Individuals and militant or terrorist groups attacked civilians in Israel, including two stabbing attacks characterized by authorities as terror attacks (see section 1.a.), in addition to rockets shot into Israel by Gaza-based terrorist groups. (For issues relating to violence or discrimination against asylum seekers, see section 2.d.)

Arab communities in Israel continued to experience high levels of crime and violence, especially due to organized crime and high numbers of illegal weapons, according to government data and NGOs. Causes included a low level of policing; limited access to capital; easy access to illegal weapons; and socioeconomic factors, such as poverty, unemployment, and the breakdown of traditional family and authority structures, according to the Abraham Fund Initiatives and other NGOs. The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on crime and violence exacerbated the situation, and surveys have shown Arab citizens trust police less than do Jewish citizens. Government actions to address the issues included: opening nine police stations in Arab towns since 2016, increasing enforcement to prevent violence, improving communication with Arab citizens through Arabic-language media and social media, enhancing trust with the community, enhancing community policing, and examining legal issues such as weapons control and raising the threshold for punishments.

Israeli authorities investigated reported attacks against Palestinians and Arab citizens of Israel, primarily in Jerusalem, by members of organizations that made anti-Christian and anti-Muslim statements and objected to social relationships between Jews and non-Jews.

The Israeli government and settler organizations in Jerusalem made efforts to increase property ownership by Jewish Israelis. Civil society organizations and representatives of the PA stated the efforts sought to emphasize Jewish history in Palestinian neighborhoods. UNOCHA and NGOs, such as Bimkom and Ir Amim, alleged that the goal of Jerusalem municipal and Israeli national policies was to decrease the number of Palestinian residents of Jerusalem. Official Israeli government policy aimed to maintain a 60 percent majority of Jews in Jerusalem.

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Jewish landowners and their descendants, or land trusts representing the families, were entitled to reclaim property they had abandoned in East Jerusalem during fighting prior to 1949, but Palestinians who abandoned property in Israel in the same period had no reciprocal right to stake their legal claim to the property (see section 1.e.). In some cases private Jewish organizations acquired legal ownership of reclaimed Jewish property in East Jerusalem, including in the Old City, and through protracted judicial action sought to evict Palestinian families living there. Authorities designated approximately 30 percent of East Jerusalem for Israeli neighborhoods/settlements. Palestinians were able in some cases to rent or purchase Israeli-owned property--including private property on government-owned land--but faced significant barriers to both. NGOs stated that after accounting for Israeli neighborhoods/settlements, government property, and declared national parks, only 13 percent of all land in East Jerusalem was available for construction by Palestinians or others.

Although the law provides that all residents of Jerusalem are fully and equally eligible for public services provided by the municipality and other authorities, the Jerusalem municipality and other authorities failed to provide sufficient social services, education, infrastructure, and emergency planning for Palestinian neighborhoods, especially in the areas between the barrier and the municipal boundary. Approximately 117,000 Palestinians lived in that area, of whom approximately 61,000 were registered as Jerusalem residents, according to government data. According to the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research, 78 percent of East Jerusalem's Arab residents and 86 percent of Arab children in East Jerusalem lived in poverty in 2017.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides for the right of workers to form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes. After a union declares a labor dispute, there is a 15-day "cooling period" in which the Histadrut, the country's largest federation of trade unions, negotiates with the employer to resolve the dispute. On the 16th day, employees are permitted to strike. Workers essential to state security, such as members of the military, police, prison service, Mossad, and

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the ISA, are not permitted to strike. The law prohibits strikes because of political issues and allows the government to declare a state of emergency to block a strike that the government deemed could threaten the economy or trade with foreign states. According to the Histadrut, this law has never been applied.

In May, Palestinian workers in Israel stopped paying an automatic fee to Israeli workers' organizations, after years in which they had paid trade union fees without representation or treatment, according to the NGO Kav LaOved.

The law prohibits antiunion discrimination. A labor court has discretionary authority to order the reinstatement of a worker fired for union activity.

The government enforced applicable laws effectively, and penalties were commensurate with those for other laws involving denials of civil rights.

According to the International Trade Union Confederation, some employers actively discouraged union participation, delayed or refused to engage in collective bargaining, or harassed workers attempting to form a union. Approval by a minimum of one-third of the employees in a workplace is needed to qualify a trade union to represent all workers in that workplace.

According to Kav LaOved, a growing number of workers in teaching, social work, security, cleaning, and caregiving are employed as contract workers, which infringes on their right to associate, as it reduces their bargaining power and their right to equality.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits and criminalizes forced or compulsory labor and prescribes penalties that are commensurate with those of other serious crimes, but the government did not effectively enforce laws protecting foreign workers and some citizens.

Migrant and Palestinian workers in agriculture and construction and women migrant domestic workers were among the most vulnerable to conditions of forced labor, including bonded labor, domestic servitude, and slavery. NGOs reported some vulnerable workers experienced indicators of forced labor, including the

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unlawful withholding of passports, restrictions on freedom of movement, limited ability to change employers, nonpayment of wages, exceedingly long working hours, threats, sexual assault, and physical intimidation, partly as a result of lack of adequate government oversight and monitoring.

For example, employees of the Turkish construction company Yilmazlar continued to pay a bond to the company before starting to work, received pay slips only intermittently, worked 12 to 24-hour days, lived in overcrowded conditions, and worked without proper safety measures. When trying to escape, workers were chased and beaten by individuals associated with the company, according to NGOs. A lawsuit filed by employees of Yilmazlar, alleging they suffered from abusive employment that amounts to human trafficking had yet to be adjudicated by year's end. Four of the five workers who have already given testimony in the case had to depart the country during the year after losing their legal status due to unemployment.

On August 20, a total of 15 Thai agricultural workers employed in the south told Kav LaOved that their work conditions included extremely long work hours, lack of sleep, work in extreme heat, poor living conditions, fines for working “too slow,” no protection while working with toxins, late salary payments, and a salary below minimum wage. Kav LaOved asked authorities to investigate the matter, but no action was taken for one month, after which the NGO submitted a Supreme Court petition. On September 30, authorities recognized the workers as trafficking victims and moved them to a shelter.

Gray-market manpower agencies engaged in labor trafficking by exploiting visa waiver agreements between Israel and former Soviet Union and Eastern European countries. The traffickers illegally recruited laborers to work in construction, caregiving, and prostitution, charged them exorbitant recruitment fees, and sometimes sold them fake documentation.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits the worst forms of child labor, provides for a minimum age of

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employment, includes limitations on working hours, and specifies occupational safety and health restrictions for children. Children age 14 and older may be employed during official school holidays in nonhazardous light work that does not harm their health. Children ages 15 and 16 who have completed education through grade nine may be employed as apprentices. Those who completed their mandatory education early or who were unable to attend an educational institution regularly may work with a government permit. Regulations restrict working hours for youths between ages 16 and 18 in all sectors. The law prohibits children younger than age 18 from working at construction sites and from working overtime.

The government generally enforced the law and conducted year-round inspections to identify cases of underage employment, with special emphasis on summer and school vacation periods. Penalties for child labor violations were not always commensurate with those for analogous serious crimes. During the year authorities imposed a number of sanctions against employers for child labor infractions, including administrative warnings and fines.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The law prohibits discrimination in employment and occupation based on age, race, religion, national origin, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, and disability. The law prohibits an employer from discriminating against employees, contractors, or persons seeking employment. The Employers of Women law and work safety regulations, however, restrict women from working in jobs deemed hazardous to their health, including through exposure to certain chemicals. The Equal Pay Law provides for equal pay for equal work of male and female employees. The Equal Rights for Persons with Disabilities Law prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities (see section 6). The law does not explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of citizenship and HIV or AIDS status.

The government generally enforced applicable law effectively, and penalties were commensurate to those for laws related to civil rights, but civil society organizations reported that discrimination in the employment or pay of women, Ethiopian-Israelis, and Arab citizens persisted. The law charges the Commission for Equal Employment Opportunities with the implementation and civil

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enforcement of the Equal Employment Opportunities Law. According to the commission's annual report, in 2019 it received 780 complaints, compared to 748 in 2018.

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2018 the average monthly salary for men was 12,500 shekels (\$3,800) and 8,540 shekels for women (\$2,600). A part of the pay gap reportedly resulted from a differential between the number of hours men and women worked each week on average.

The gender gap in unemployment during the COVID-19 crisis increased significantly throughout the year, from 1 percent in the beginning of the year to 37 percent as of the year's end. Experts anticipated increased gender inequality in the job market following the COVID-19 crisis due in part to the disparity in unemployment figures of women and men.

According to government and NGO data, migrant workers, irregular African migrants, and Palestinians (both documented and undocumented) were ineligible to receive benefits such as paid leave and legal recourse in cases involving workplace injury.

On April 6, the government issued COVID-19 emergency regulations allowing employers to place pregnant women, women on maternity leave, and women undergoing fertility treatments on leave-without-pay status. Employers were allowed to take this measure despite a law stipulating that such an action may only take place upon receiving a permit from the Ministry of Labor, which may be contested through a legal process. On April 17, the government retracted the regulation following petitions from NGOs. On April 20, NGOs cancelled the petitions.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The law provides for a national minimum wage for all sectors of the economy. The minimum wage was above the poverty income level for individuals but below the poverty level for couples and families. Authorities investigated employers, imposed administrative sanctions, and filed indictments for violations of the

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Minimum Wage Law during the year.

The law allows a maximum 43-hour workweek at regular pay and provides for paid annual holidays. Premium pay for overtime is set at 125 percent for the first two hours and 150 percent for any hour thereafter up to a limit of 15 hours of overtime per week. The government did not effectively enforce minimum wage and overtime laws. According to the National Insurance, the level of noncompliance with the hourly minimum wage law stood at 11 percent of the labor market in 2018. Data from the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Social Services showed that enforcement actions were taken against 156 employers during 2019. Penalties were not always commensurate with those for similar crimes. According to Kav LaOved, 700,000 individuals were employed on an hourly basis, which reduced their social rights and benefits because most lacked an employment contract containing specific protections.

The Labor Inspection Service, along with union representatives and construction site safety officers, enforced labor, health, and safety standards in the workplace. The government did not effectively enforce the law in all sectors, and penalties for violations were seldom applied. Labor inspectors have the right to make unannounced visits, but the number of inspectors was insufficient to enforce compliance, particularly in the construction and agriculture industries, and scaffolding regulations were inadequate to protect workers from falls. No law protects the employment of workers who report on situations that endanger health or safety or remove themselves from such situations. Seventy percent of the labor inspectors were not working in April due to COVID-19 restrictions, according to Haaretz. Employers rather than inspectors were responsible for identifying unsafe situations.

On December 6, the government implemented a 2016 government resolution to issue work permits directly to Palestinian construction workers instead of to Israeli employers to avoid trade in permits and attendant high brokerage fees. This implementation followed a September petition submitted to the Supreme Court by ACRI and Kav LaOved. The government continued to issue work permits to Israeli employers rather than to Palestinian workers in other sectors. According to Kav LaOved, prior to this change approximately 100,000 migrant workers and Palestinian workers lacked mobility in the labor market because their work permits

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were tied to their employers. The work permits linked the employee to a specific employer, creating a dependence that some employers and employment agencies exploited by charging employees monthly commissions and fees. According to the Bank of Israel's 2019 report, 30 percent of Palestinian workers in the country and the settlements paid brokerage fees for their permits in monthly payments of approximately 2,000 shekels (\$610), or 20 percent of their salary. In many cases the employer of record hired out employees to other workplaces. More than one-half the documented Palestinian workers did not receive written contracts or pay slips, according to the International Labor Organization.

During the COVID-19 lockdowns, the Ministry of Defense issued an order allowing Palestinians working in essential sectors to continue their work only if they remained in Israel for an extended period of time without returning to the West Bank. The order placed responsibility on employers with regards to employees' accommodation, but NGOs reported that many Palestinians lived in poor and dangerous conditions. Following a petition by NGOs to the Supreme Court, the government issued emergency regulations on May 5, and the Knesset passed a temporary law on August 5, which defined and regulated employers' responsibilities towards employees, including regarding housing and health insurance.

The country has bilateral work agreements (BWAs) with Bulgaria, Moldova, Romania, Ukraine, and China to employ migrants in the construction sector and with Thailand and Sri Lanka for the agricultural sector. BWAs provided foreign workers with information regarding their labor rights as well as a translated copy of their labor contract prior to arrival in the country. The government continued to help fund a hotline for migrant workers to report violations, and the government's enforcement bodies claimed all complaints were investigated. The absence of BWAs for foreign caregivers and additional migrant workers not covered by BWAs led to continuing widespread abuses and exploitative working conditions, including excessive recruitment fees, false employment contracts, and lack of legal protections related to housing, nonpayment of wages, physical and sexual violence, and harassment.

Some employers in the agriculture sector circumvented the BWAs by recruiting "volunteers" from developing countries to earn money and learn Israeli agriculture

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methods. Volunteers worked eight to 10 hours per day at a salary equal to half the minimum wage and without social benefits. The individuals received volunteer visas, which did not permit them to work. Other firms employed foreign students registered for work-study programs that consisted of long hours of manual labor and pay below the minimum wage. Some employers recruited low-skilled foreign workers under the guise of being “experts” in their field. PIBA adopted guidelines for classifying foreign workers as experts. Under these guidelines, the government considers an expert to be highly skilled in a field that does not require higher education or advanced degrees. Additionally, experts may not perform low-skilled jobs, come from a country with a lower GDP than Israel, come from a country listed on the Department of State’s *Trafficking in Persons Report* as Tier 3 or Tier 2 watch list, or come from a country without a BWA.

A police unit was responsible for investigating workplace accidents that resulted in death or severe injuries, mainly at construction sites; however, according to media reports, the police unit carried out less than 10 investigations since its launch in 2019. On January 26, following an investigation conducted by the police unit, prosecutors indicted two junior workers, but no management workers, in causing a death “by negligence” of a Chinese worker. During the year, 65 workers died in work accidents, and another 423 workers were injured, according to Kav LaOved.